JOURNAL OF
DHARMA

ASIAN HERMENEUTICS:
NEW HORIZONS

July-September 2005 Vol. 30, No. 3

JOURNAL OF DHARMA
An International Quarterly of World Religions

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Published by
Dharma Research Association
Centre for the Study of World Religions
DVK, Dharmaram College
560 029 Bangalore, India
Tel. +91-80-4111 6111; Fax: +91-80-4111 6000
E-Mail: info@journalofdharma.com
Website: www.journalofdharma.com

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Editorial

ASIAN HERMENEUTICS: NEW HORIZONS

Human beings are hermeneutic beings. Inasmuch as they are rational, they entail the capacity to understand and respond to whatever happens and whatever they encounter within the ever-expanding horizons of their lives. Understood literally as the capacity to interpret, being hermeneutic is a basic function of being human: basically, every human being involves in interpreting anything and everything that happens in and around him or her. In fact, it is the *human* way of understanding, appraisal, and appropriation.

Although the historical length and breadth of hermeneutics as a scientific discipline may be disputable, the capacity of humanity – individually and collectively – to be hermeneutic remains unquestionable: the hermeneutic endeavour is co-extensive with human existence.

As a scientific discipline, hermeneutics[1] concerns every human enquiry: it is a science of and for human beings. Though it came to prominence as an independent science only in the 20th century, especially according to the western standards, its origins could be traced to the earliest human communications, oral traditions, and extant written texts. Constitution of human communities, over and above isolated individuals, had given definite patterns in doing hermeneutics. This had resulted from a plurality of perspectives cultivated by different communities, having their existential needs as the motivating force. While the individual perspectives did have a bearing on any interpretation by way of penetrating analyses and intuitive syntheses, communitarian emphases had a decisive impact on how these interpretations have been put forth, regulated, accommodated, and given for posterity. In many an instance, therefore, hermeneutical inquiries initiated by individual insights have been reined in by the larger spectrum of community commitment.

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[1] Etymologically, hermeneutics has a relation to Hermes, the messenger god of the Greeks. The task of Hermes was to act as a messenger between gods and human beings. In order to carry out this task, he had to be conversant in the idioms of both groups. In fact, he had to understand and interpret the messages of one in view of the world of the other, i.e., the recipient group. The very literal meaning indicates how complex could be the task lying behind the hermeneutic enterprise.

Just as a plurality of individuals and communities is involved in the hermeneutic enterprise, a multiplicity of perspectives is natural, which, in turn, vouches for the dynamism and beauty of any meaningful human endeavour. Hermeneutics involves an art which cannot be rigorously formulated into a set of determinate rules or definitive patterns and procedures. Sensitivity in this regard would mean that we can never hope to eliminate the intrinsic openness, plurality, and ambiguity which are involved in every instance of understanding and interpretation. Therefore, in any community of inquiry, pluralism shall not merely be tolerated but must be encouraged, though, without sacrificing truth and the ensuing commitments upheld by the community; pluralism shall not be an excuse to admit and perpetuate chaos and anarchy in any form, as such would destabilise the foundations of the community itself.[2] One of the many advantages we shall reap from the admission of plurality in the hermeneutic enterprise is the complementary nature of various attempts and viewpoints, which can lead us towards "mutually critical correlations"[3] among them.

The necessity of a plurality of human behaviour patterns, viewpoints, perspectives, philosophies, etc., facilitates a plurality of hermeneutics that cannot be restricted to any single tradition or school of thought, but must be open and applicable to various traditions, cultures, and peoples, each having the ability to address the existential needs and futuristic horizons within which they have emerged. Though the dynamics of these may be different in some aspects, there will be methodologies and areas of interest shared in common among them. Moreover, specific nuances and emphases that form the worldview of the cultures and traditions in Asia did have some common denominators that have evolved over a period of time. Identification of the common factors in the Asian way of doing hermeneutics, however, does not rule out admitting a plurality of hermeneutic traditions within the Asian context itself. This, in fact, is the justification for addressing "Asian Hermeneutics: New Horizons" in this issue of the *Journal of Dharma*.

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[2] Hans-Georg Gadamer opines: "Every age has to understand a transmitted text *in its own way*, for the text is part of the tradition in which the age takes an objective interest and in which it seeks to understand itself." *Truth and Method*, London: Sheed & Ward, 1975, 263.

[3] David Tracy, "Hermeneutics and Tradition," *The Hermeneutics Reader*, Kurt Mueller-Vollmer ed., New York: Continuum, 1989, 52.

Asia is known for originating and promoting religions that are capable of responding to the needs of people and civilizations. In fact, many of the oldest extant major religions of the world have had their origin in the Asian bosom. As many of these religions have existed side-by-side, people have been trained to look upon members of other religions with an openness and mutual acceptance, as positively enhancing characteristic marks of a pluralistic society. So, pluralism was not introduced in Asia as a theoretical necessity after endless discussions among philosophers and theologians, but cultivated and imbibed as a spontaneous response and accepted as a natural habitat. In this context, it would be an oversight if we do not take into account the recent spurts of fundamentalist forces. Fundamentalist tendencies among the religionists have almost turned out to be a global menace in the recent past, destabilizing even the most considered and engineered plan to re-establish global peace, the ultimate aim of every religion. Perpetrators of fundamentalism and those agencies that manipulate the religious sensibilities of any vulnerable group tend to forget the fact that peace cannot be bought through hatred, violence, malice, religious intolerance, or political might. Although the equations continue to change for both these parties, depending on their political agenda and pragmatic ends, the ultimate casualties are the people and their genuine religious sentiments.

A cursory perusal of the sacred scriptures of these religions, however, indicates that they are so rich – philosophically, theologically, and existentially – in articulating their basic religious tenets. Over the centuries, subsequent religious enquiries have also given rise to a variety of interpretations, making their foundational experiences ever-living and vibrant, enabling the followers to assimilate their meaning without losing sight of both the original spirit with which they were codified and the needs of the times. Hence, their hermeneutic task was one of enlivening the sacred texts in the living milieu of the people who have inherited the religious and cultural ethos from the bygone ages.

The recent phenomena of ‘new age masters’ (among Hindus), charismatic movements (among Christians), etc., that continue to command a large following, including devotees from educated and economically well-to-do classes, must be looked with interest and concern. This scene is particularly striking in the Indian Subcontinent. An important distinction that could be noticed in their attempts not only to offer apparently novel (but mostly literal) interpretations of the orthodox texts accepted by the community, but also to *interpret themselves* as the embodiments of the divine. These are clear instances of reason being misrepresented as a power to manipulate texts, situations, and persons for the ulterior purposes or hidden agendas that go against the positive sense of any interpretation in terms of authentic understanding that is capable of enhancing and promoting human life at large in every sphere. While some such cases have been found to be enhancing the stream of life of their votaries, many an instance in this regard has turned out to be farce. The scrupulous and uncritical religious psyches of some people who go after these masters/movements, however, do not differentiate between the 'divine' claims made by them (it seems fashionable among them to assume the garb of *avatāra* or incarnation, though their being and doing ultimately do not qualify many a time for any enhancement of the life situations of their followers) and some known but unbecoming aspects of their own lives, in spite of bearing counter witnesses. Moreover, it is alarming to note that some of them tend to manipulate the religious innocence of their followers even by destabilising the morale of the people and the fundamental unity of the nation, all for the realization of their own materialistic designs and selfish motives. Their new hermeneutics is prompted by what they can establish as their private domains with pseudo spirituality, political clout, and economic power.

In contrast to the subtle religious nuances involved in being the birthplace of so many religions and the ever-vibrant religious fervour visible among millions of people continuing to practise religion of their choices, Asia is also known for situations that are unbecoming for any religion worth its name: social, religious, and political oppression both from within and without, unending suffering of the masses created by a mismanagement of human and material resources, marginalization of people from the lower strata of the society, etc. Added to these, the colonial rule of many of the nations of Asia by the West in the past and the new imperialism perpetuated and practised by almost the same powers during the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries have created a cultural, social, and economic victimization of many a people in Asia.

Any text worth the name is multi-functional. It depends on (i) who tries to understand and appropriate, (ii) how and when this is done, and (iii) with what motive it is being carried out that would finally determine the meaning and nuances of a text that is being interpreted. Texts may, for example, serve self-interests and interests of dominating power structures, if they are appropriated by those who are at the helm of the affairs of the society.

> Texts can be used for social manipulation or control, or to authorise, or to appear to authorise, values which serve the interests of some individual or corporate entity... For if there can be no critique from outside of a community, hermeneutics serves only to affirm its corporate self, its structures, and its corporate values. It can use texts only by the same ploy as that which oppressors and oppressive power-structures use, namely in the service of its own interests.[4]

Danger lurks there, and if such trends continue to exist, notions of freedom from bondage, liberation from oppressive social structures, etc., will be alien to our life world. It is true that official interpretations have a natural tendency to idealize, defend, and safeguard the *status quo*; indeed, traditional paradigms are categorically asserted to be *the* right and true, while any implied novel perspective would be looked down with suspicion and antipathy. This is true of the Asian situation as well. The challenging messages of Asian religions seem to be already controlled, domesticated, and transposed by the vested interests by aligning either with the traditional hierarchies (wherever they are available), or with the new movements or the 'new age masters', ultimately nullifying any trans-contextual function of these religions. The best example could be identified in the corrupt and corrupting politicians of the Indian polity, who move from one popular pilgrim centre to another, from one *guru* to another, shielding themselves with pseudo religious fervour, bailing themselves out of any political threat from the followers of those religious identities, and ultimately buying out the religious sentiments of the masses for their own political mileage. Thus, they not only domesticate a religious text as it used to be, but many a religion as a whole! Further, instead of being instrumental in expanding horizons of life vision, they restrict the pre-existing social horizons as much as possible, and shun all attempts for transformation by blocking the emergence of any new horizon that would challenge their comfort zones. They too are doing hermeneutics, though on the wrong side of the spectrum.

Given the above stated conditions and possibilities, everyone has to be constantly vigilant against squeezing in one's own private agendas, wishes, and images in the garb of the only proper and valid interpretation. In the context of any system or theory that is relatively narrow, ill-informed, and self-centred, we need a trans-contextual critique emerging from the existential needs of the life-world. It will enlarge the horizons of the society by way of enhancing meaningfulness, freedom, joy, openness, etc. Thus, hermeneutics must essentially involve self-criticism to check any attempt on the part of the interpreter from slipping into self-deception and deceit. Even if one begins to offer interpretations centred on the individual's benefits or the preservation of the *status quo*, it would become meaningful and life-giving to the life-world of a community only when its horizons of interpretation are enabled to expand, decentring the individual and corporate self.

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[4] Anthony Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992, 6-7.

Hermeneutics is not only concerned with the old texts and their literal interpretations, oriented towards a retrieval or recovery of the original meaning and preservation of the past; it is rather a genuine attempt to understand the texts by a person or people placed in a different historical milieu, without losing sight of the 'meaning' communicated through them. Grasping the 'meaning' will take place neither in a neutral field nor in a vacuum, but only in an existential situation that calls for a competent and comprehensive dialogue with the contemporary experiences and worldviews of individuals and communities. Such an approach will revitalize the content of the texts by trying to live their insights, responding to them in a creative manner, and hoping to enhance human and cosmic existence at large. Thus, we should involve in a continuous dialoguing with past and present texts and their authors, with an earnest desire to discover their hidden riches, leading to a better appropriation of truth, and of extending and expanding the horizons of our personal and communitarian perspectives. Despite the complexities and difficulties involved in this process, the possibility of realizing truth – even if it were very much limited – should keep everyone on the go, keeping him or her alert, inquiring, and questioning the text without any chance for complacency.

If attaining and appropriating truth were the goal of hermeneutics, one must begin it by understanding oneself and the fellow human beings in their life-world. In fact, this process necessarily includes recognition of the limitations of each other, especially of oneself, making each one vulnerable to the other. Awareness of the limits would pave the way for patience, openness, mutual respect, readiness to learn from each other, etc. Indeed, this calls for an understanding of a text, event, or person by way of a communitarian hermeneutic endeavour. Even in this, however, criticism has to operate continuously so that both the 'limits' and the 'possibilities' could be unveiled and explored, enabling us to be freed from enslaving illusions and undue commitment to idols and ideologies.

An exclusive thrust on understanding and interpreting the mind of the author, without any reference to the contemporary living context of the community, will only continue to perpetuate the *Sitz-im-Leben* of the author and his or her community, which may turn out to be irrelevant to the present. Moreover, it may also continue to recreate and perpetuate the same old world, without the needed openness to the present and future-oriented horizons. Undue stress on the original mind and the world view can be as enslaving and oppressive as any other system had done in the past. Some even tend to create an aura of mystification around the text, whereby the masses will be barred from any direct access to the truth communicated (as it was the case with the people of the *Śūdra* caste among Hindus). Mystification is an effective tool adopted by vested interests (wherever power-structures are absolutized) to inculcate relatively useful values or pseudo-objective truths as real or objective truths. Texts and their meanings which can accommodate fluidity and plurality without any limit should not be allowed to be domesticated by those in authority: their natural tendency is to suppress change and any call for transformation. Any structure or system, if absolutized, will imprison and destroy the creative spirit of a hermeneutic being and community, reaffirming pre-existing prejudices, traditions, and attitudes, blocking any novel perspective on approaching and understanding truth.

Hermeneutics is not primarily an attempt to make logical abstractions, as many other sciences may tend to do. While other sciences formulate their principles by moving away from the concrete and real, hermeneutics can do justice to itself only by a reversal process: it has to come closer and closer to the hard and naked facts of life, even if they were embarrassing and painful. In a dynamic understanding of the task of hermeneutics as a science, openness to unseen and unexplored dimensions of life is inevitable. For, in such a hermeneutic enterprise "[human] understanding remains a single, complex, interactive process in which the interpreter's own developing understanding undergoes constant revision, modification, and correction."[5] An illustration drawn from the daily ongoing experience among lovers will illuminate this principle of ongoing transformation and expanding horizons of relevance and meaningfulness happening in the life-world of each other.[6] A young man may share with an 'in-group' interests in rock music and driving. He falls in love with a girl whose peers, from a different 'in-group', reflect typifications and relevance drawn from an enthusiasm for Indian classical music and Hindu temples. If the two persons are really 'in love', they will discover that their own criteria of relevance *rapidly expand and become transformed* as they get involved with each other. Further, their prior typifications of each other's relevance will be shattered and disengaged from mere stereotypes, taking them to newer heights in their understanding and interpretation of everything happening in their life of togetherness.

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[5] Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 559.

"An openness to be willing to listen, to see the other person's point of view, and to be changed, characterizes any hermeneutically sensitive reading of texts, no less than in encounters between persons in everyday life."[7] So, hermeneutic understanding that is characterized by a dynamic openness to the text as well as to the life-world of the present indicates that an interpersonal and interdependent mechanism in doing hermeneutics is promising in the Asian context. It becomes integral and emancipatory over against the experiences of division, alienation, and depersonalization. The goal of such a hermeneutic enterprise is interpersonal commitment and social cooperation that would enable individuals and societies as a whole to practically involve in a holistic uplift of human life, having its roots not only in the flimsy distant past but in the firm foundations of the enlivening present.

In the light of what has already been stated hermeneutics is understood as a science of making sense of the past in the present with a futuristic orientation. In this science, past, present, and future get transformed and liberated from their own stereotyped frameworks; in fact, they become something more than what they were, are, or will be through the hermeneutic being and activity of human beings who can engage with texts, events, and persons creatively and proactively.

Against the present-day experience of perplexity and confusion on the role of classical Indian culture as a whole and particularly about its values in contemporary India, the first article, "*Nyāya Theory of Implication and Interpretation*," by John Vattanky establishes the fact that in *Nyāya* theory, where discussions on the philosophy of language and theories of interpretation are carried out, India has pioneered a distinguished history of theories of interpretation. The interpretative strategy of the *Nyāya* is centred around the profound discussions on *śabda* (word). A masterly analysis of Significatory Function (*vṛtti*), Denotative Function (*śakti*), and Implication (*lakṣaṇā*) establishes, according to Vattanky, a sound basis for developing a *Nyāya* theory of interpretation with which the meaning of a text as intended by its author could always be established. It is affirmed that the consistent application of these theories which have been drawn from the *Nyāya* philosophy of language, in general, and of implication, in particular, can go a long way in enlightening our minds with regard to the problems of Indian philosophy as well as of Indian culture.

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[6] This narrative and the following reflection are inspired by Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 609.

[7] Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 33

"Interpretation of Religious Scriptures from Asian Context" by Thomas Kadankavil is an exploration into the possibilities of evolving a new universal hermeneutics for the Sacred Scriptures of world religions, giving importance to the distinctive factors of the living context of the nations in which these religious texts have been accepted as sacred. This research is carried out with the earnest hope that in doing hermeneutics as a scientific method, if evolved through a comparative study of different religious hermeneutics, a larger area of common agreement on principles of interpretation in understanding the scriptures of world religions could be reached. In order to actually verify his hypothesis, Kadankavil makes an analysis of biblical interpretation against the backdrop of the 'Third World' and asserts that today hermeneutics has to address the wider context of religious pluralism and the 'third world' of the new people. He concludes saying that the hermeneutical responsibility to the text has to reveal and enlighten the mysteries of ultimate reality through language.

Paul Kalluveettil explores Indian milieu of biblical hermeneutics in his article "God's Word for the Indian Folk." He establishes through a very interesting analysis of the biblical as well as Indian sources that the existential reality of 'land' in India – which is misused and underused both in the villages and cities – shall provide a context-sensitive understanding of 'land' as biblical 'text'. According to him, Jesus' own incarnation points at a paradoxical, but liberating, situation: "The very purpose of Jesus' words and actions was to make the so-called 'land-ed' people 'landless', and the 'landless' ones of God the 'land-ed' beings." So, his hermeneutical reading of the Indian situation of landlessness invites the Christian community in India to be instrumental in delivering justice to the people of India: "*Like their Master they should live a life of 'landlessness'* *in order to make humans 'land-ed' people*," as this 'land' ultimately becomes the Word that would deliver the Kingdom of God for a majority of Indians. The article ends with a practical hermeneutical programme of reading the Bible from the perspective of Indian reality of 'landlessness' and the need for 'land-edness'.

Raphael Neelamkavil, in his article "Reconstructing the Foundations of Vedāntic Metaphysics: A Pluriversal Model for Philosophizing," makes a hermeneutic reading of Vedāntic texts to reconstruct and integrate its ontology from a new angle of Einaic philosophy. Imbibing inspiration from the western methodology of doing ontology and hermeneutic readings, and taking to heart some of the unresolved problems in Vedāntic Metaphysics, Neelamkavil undertakes a corrective in some of the fundamental ontological issues by trying to bridge the lacunae identified. The *Ātmā́n*-into-*Brā́hman* movement through realization of Wisdom as encapsulated in the principle "*Tattvamasī*" and other *mahāvākya*s, for example, poses a lacuna. For, according to him, in this world, the individual (*Ātmā́n*) experiences change and decay, but in *Brā́hman*, the *Ātmā́n* experiences no change. This absolute general ontological difference and lack of mutual approachability between *Ātmā́n* and *Brā́hman* have not been questioned sufficiently well, and so, the ontological consequences of this on the nature of *Brā́hman* and the epistemological consequences of it on religious practice are not sufficiently mended. As a result, he argues, mystical epistemology is not properly exploited for the purpose of answering the question as to how to contemplatively and ethically overcome the seemingly absolute difference between the many and the One, so that socio-mystical practice is, in principle, made possible. Adopting the Transcendental, the Specific Transcendentals, the Transcendent, the Transcendent Divine and the Specific Transcendents as the keys for reconstruction and interpretation he attempts to provide his 'Einaic' solution to some of the issues identified.

Every human person is real and is yet to be realized. The process of realization does not happen in a vacuum, but in the concrete context of diversity, freedom, and interpersonal relationships that would enhance our capacity for understanding and creative response. Doing hermeneutics involves, therefore, disciplining of the intellect which would also include making provisions for integral education (the barest minimum should include both religious and secular spheres) to all, so that each one will be in a position to understand and interpret not only texts of any nature, but also human situations and human lives in an authentic manner. This necessitates, especially within the Asian horizons, the need to engage Asian texts, contexts, and life itself in any training that is imparted; for, engagement with these will naturally expand our horizons and give rise to new configurations that we naturally inherit from living traditions or we acquire by ourselves through creative interactions in the course of time. In the context of a plurality of human beings, human communities, religious affiliations, etc., which we find in abundance in Asia, it is an existential need that the definition of authenticity also gives due place to mutual understanding among scholars as well as commoners spread across the territories of different religions. Indeed, within the Asian horizons of hermeneutic enterprise, we should adopt a proactive approach in our unceasing hermeneutical quest so that the 'dead' and the 'deadening' will be avoided and eliminated and, instead, the 'living' and 'life-giving' will be continuously incorporated.

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NYĀYA THEORY OF IMPLICATION AND INTERPRETATION

John Vattanky[◆]

1. Introduction

It is well known that in contemporary Western philosophy, especially under the influence of Gadamer, Ricoeur, and so on, hermeneutics and allied disciplines are assuming more and more significance. The influence of these hermeneutical theories has gradually been felt also on present day Indian thought. What, however, is not so well known even among Indian philosophers themselves is that India had a long and distinguished history of theories of interpretation. *Mīmāṃsa* system, for example, tried to lay down the rules of interpretation in order to arrive at the true meaning of the Vedas.[1] The discipline of Grammar, which again had a long history in India, reached its philosophical heights in the path-breaking works of Bhartṛhari.[2] Philosophers of Grammar had to struggle with the problem of meaning and in some ways also with the question of interpretation. In the *Nyāya* system, discussions on the philosophy of language and theories of interpretation were carried on largely in the context of the discussions on *śabda* (word), as a means of valid verbal knowledge. There is no treatise exclusively on interpretation as such in the modern sense. Yet, on the basis of what the Naiyāyikas have contributed towards a philosophy of language, we can construct a theory of interpretation adequate to meet the philosophical challenges of today. The present essay is an attempt to

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[◆] **Prof. Dr. John Vattanky** sj, trained in philosophy at Oxford and Vienna, is a well-known expert in Sanskrit language and Indian Logic. His book, *Gaṅgeśa's Philosophy of God*, has been hailed by the critics as a study of great significance and precision. He is Professor of Indian Philosophy and Sanskrit at Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune.

[1] For a general idea of the various theories of meaning and interpretation, see K. Kunjunni Raja: *Indian Theories of Meaning*, Madras: The Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1963.

[2] For a summary of Bhartṛhari's ideas and for bibliography, see Karl Potter, *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, vol. 5, 121-174.

develop such a theory of interpretation based on the *Nyāya* contribution on the philosophy of language in general and implication in particular.

For this purpose, first of all, an acquaintance with the context in which a *Nyāya* theory of interpretation may be developed is necessary.[3] Basically, this context is the prolonged and profound discussions of the *Nyāya* thinkers on *śabda*. According to the Naiyāyikas, the fourth means of valid knowledge is *śabda* (word). They explain the process of knowledge arising from *śabda*, i.e., verbal knowledge as follows:[4] first of all it is stated that the instrumental cause of such a verbal knowledge is knowledge of words. Here the knowledge of words which is the instrumental cause is the perception of words by the sense of hearing, or the knowledge of words which arises from seeing the script. The operation of the instrumental cause is the recollection of the meaning of words. The auxiliary cause is the knowledge of denotative function (*śakti*). Without the knowledge of denotative function (*śakti*), it is impossible to have recollection of the meaning of words. The final result of this process is verbal knowledge, which is the knowledge of the relation between the meanings of words.

2. Process of Verbal Knowledge

Let us now go a little more in detail into this process of verbal knowledge. The actual instrumental cause of verbal knowledge is not words which are actually being known, but knowledge itself of words. The difference between these two positions is that in the first case words are actually uttered and in the second case, there is no need of actually uttered words, as for example, when a person who keeps silence writes down words we come to have the knowledge of words by seeing the script.

The operation of this instrumental cause is the recollection of the meaning of words (*padajanyapadārthasmaraṇa*) and this recollection itself has to be produced by the knowledge of words. If it is stated that only *padajanyapadārthajñāna* and not *padajanyapadārthasmaraṇa* is the operation, then, if someone hears the word 'jar', for example, and then in the next moment he sees the thing 'jar', and has perceptual knowledge of the meanings of words, then he would have verbal knowledge. But such a possibility is not accepted by anyone. Therefore, *padajanyapadārthasmaraṇa* and not *padajanyapadārthajñāna* is said to be the operation of the instrumental cause, viz., *padajñāna*.

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[3] The most recent study in this area is by B. K. Matilal: *The Word and the World*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1990.

[4] What follows is based on the section on implication (*lakṣaṇā*) in *Kārikāvalī* of Viswanatha with the commentaries *Muktāvalī, Dinakarī* and *Ramarudrī*, Atmaram Narayan Jere ed., Varanasi: Krishnadas Academy, 1988, 385-392; see also John Vattanky, *Nyāya Philosophy of Language, Analysis, Text, Translation and Interpretation of Upamāna and Śabda sections of Kārikāvalī, Muktāvalī and Dinakarī*, Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, Indian Book Centre, 1995.

Here it should be noted carefully that if the qualifier *padajanya* is not given to *padārthasmaraṇa*, the following difficulty arises: when a person hears a sentence and recollects the meanings of words by the knowledge of certain things which are other than the words themselves but which are related to the meanings of words, he would have verbal knowledge. In order to avoid this possibility, *padārthasmaraṇa* should be qualified by *padajanya*.

Further, the recollection of the meanings of words should be produced by the knowledge of words with the help of the significatory function of words; otherwise, the following difficulty will arise: when one hears words like 'jar', etc., since these words inhere in ether one can have recollection of ether also. This is because the knowledge of one relatum (viz., word 'jar') produces the remembrance of the other relatum of the relation, viz., ether. Hence, one would have also the verbal knowledge also of ether. This difficulty is avoided when it is stated that the recollection of the meanings of words which is produced by the knowledge of words is to be taken in the sense that the recollection of the meanings of words is produced by the knowledge of words with the help of the significatory function of words.

3. Nature of Significatory Function (*vṛtti*)

Now a question arises: what exactly is the nature of this significatory function (*vṛtti*)? According to the Naiyāyikas, significatory function is either denotative (*śakti*) or implication (*lakṣaṇā*). These functions are in the form of relations that exist between words and their meanings. Literary critics accept *vyajñānā*, suggestions also as another form of significatory function. But the Naiyāyikas hold that suggestion is included in inferential knowledge.

4. Nature of Denotative Function (*śakti*)

Denotative function is the relation of a word with its meaning. However, in explaining the nature of this relation the ancient and modern schools of the Naiyāyikas differ. According to the former, denotative function of words is in the form of the will of God, that from this word this meaning is to be understood. Therefore, according to the old Naiyāyikas, terms like *nadī*, *vṛddhi*, etc. (which are technical terms of grammar), coined by moderns only, have no denotative function. The modern Naiyāyikas, on the other hand, accept denotative function in terms such as *nadī*, *vṛddhi*, etc., also since they assert that denotative function is in the form of will only and not necessarily only in the form of the will of God. From this it follows that, according to both old and modern Naiyāyikas, in well known words, such as 'jar', 'cloth', etc., there is denotative function in the form of the will of God. Further, it should be noted that, according to both the schools, from the *apabhraṃśa* words like *gargarī* which means jar, one gets verbal knowledge merely by the erroneous knowledge of denotative function. A *Nyāya* theory of interpretation can, however, be developed only on the basis of the other significatory function, i.e., implication (*lakṣaṇā*). Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the nature of implication.

5. Nature of Implication (*lakṣaṇā*)

Implication is a relation with the meaning which is conveyed by the denotative function (*lakṣaṇā śakyasaṃbandārtātparyānu-papattitah*). According to the old Naiyāyikas, either the incompatibility of semantic connection (*anvayānupapatti*) or the incompatibility of the intention of the speaker (*tātparyānu-papatti*) is the cause for postulating implication. As for instance, in the sentence *gaṅgāyāṃ ghoṣaḥ* (meaning, 'there is a village on the Ganges'), it is not possible to have the semantic connection of the denoted meaning of the word *gaṅgā*, viz., stream with the denoted meaning of the word *ghoṣa*, viz., village. Such an incompatibility of semantic connection is the cause of postulating implication of the word *gaṅgā* in bank. But this cannot be the only cause of implication, for if it were the only cause of implication, then, there would be no implication in such instances as *yaṣṭīḥ praveśaya* (meaning, 'make the sticks enter'). The reason is that there is no incompatibility of semantic connection of sticks with entering. But if the intention of the speaker is considered as the cause of implication, then there could be implication here also, i.e., the word 'stick' has implication in one who carries the stick. The reason is that the intention of the speaker is not to admit sticks, but the persons who hold the sticks in order that they can take their food.

The modern Naiyāyikas hold that everywhere only the incompatibility of the intention of the speaker is the cause of postulating implication. This is because in the example of *gaṅgāyāṃ ghoṣaḥ*, sometimes there can be implication for the word *gaṅgā* in the bank and sometimes there can be implication for the word *ghoṣa* in fish. But which word is to be taken in the implied meaning can be determined only by reference to the intention of the speaker. Hence, the conclusion of the modern Naiyāyikas is that the impossibility of the intention of the speaker only is the cause of implication.

Implication is of two kinds: *jahatsvārthā* and *ajahatsvārthā*. *Jahatsvārthalakṣaṇā* is that by which a word abandons its denoted meaning, i.e., in the verbal knowledge arising from it, the implied meaning is the object and not the denoted meaning. As for example, from the sentence *gaṅgāyāṃ ghoṣaḥ,* there is the verbal knowledge in the form that there is a village on the bank. Here the denoted meaning of the word *gaṅgā,* viz., stream, is totally abandoned; *ajahatsvārthalakṣaṇā* is that in which the word does not give up its denoted meaning, i.e., verbal knowledge arising from it has the denoted meaning also as its object, as for example, *chatriṇo yānti.* Here the word *chatrin* has implication in the meaning of one group consisting of those having umbrellas and those not having umbrellas. So, in the verbal knowledge, the denoted meaning, i.e., those having umbrellas is not abandoned.

Here it should be noted carefully that the statement that the expression *chatrin* has implication in the meaning of one group consisting of those having umbrellas and those not having umbrellas is made, according to the system of the Grammarians. This cannot be admitted; the reason is that the expression *chatrin* consists of the stem *chatra*, meaning umbrella and the suffix *ini*, meaning that which is related. Therefore, since we get the knowledge of that which is related to umbrella from the words *chatra* and *ini*, we need not postulate denotative function for the expression *chatrin* in the meaning of that which is related to umbrella. Since the expression *chatrin* has no denotative function, it follows that it has also no implication.

According to the Naiyāyikas, however, there is implication for the word *chatra* in the meaning of the-state-of-being-one-group consisting of those having umbrellas and those not having umbrellas. The denoted meaning of the suffix *ini* is 'that which is related'. Thus, the whole expression means *chatrighaṭitaikasamudāyatvavanto gacchanti*, i.e., *chatrighaṭi-taikasamudāyo gacchati*, i.e., a group consisting of those having umbrellas and not having umbrellas is going. However, it should be noted here that there is a prolonged discussion between the Grammarians and the Naiyāyikas whether there is denotative function on the expression *chatrin*; we cannot enter here into the details of this discussion.

It should be further noted that the generally accepted opinion of the Naiyāyikas is that where the denoted meaning of the word which has implication is totally abandoned in verbal knowledge, there the implication is *jahatsvārthā*, as in the case of the verbal knowledge in the form 'there is a village on the bank' (*tīre ghoṣaḥ*) arising from the sentence *gaṅgāyāṃ ghoṣaḥ*. Where the denoted meaning of the word which has implication becomes the object in verbal knowledge as qualifier, there implication is *ajahatsvārthā* as in the case of the verbal knowledge in the form 'there is a village on the bank of the Ganges' (*gaṅgātīre ghoṣaḥ*), arising from the sentence *gaṅgāyāṃ ghoṣaḥ*. Here, the denoted meaning of the word *gaṅgā* is a qualifier to bank. Some Naiyāyikas, on the contrary, hold that in this latter case there is *jahatsvārthā* implication and for them *ajahatsvārthā* implication is where the denoted meaning of a word which has implication becomes object in verbal knowledge as the principal qualificand.

Further, the Naiyāyikas do not admit implication in the determinant of the state-of-being-implied-meaning (*lakṣyatāva-cchedaka*); yet, such a determinant becomes the object of the remembrance and verbal knowledge arising from the word having implication. Then, a question arises as to how the determinant-of-the-state-of-being-implied-meaning (*lakṣyatāva-cchedaka*) becomes the object in remembrance and verbal knowledge without the knowledge of significatory function in it. The answer is that sometimes the knowledge of the implication for the word *gaṅgā* in the sentence *gaṅgāyāṃ ghoṣaḥ* is in *tīra*, which is qualified by *tīratva*; sometimes such knowledge of implication is in *tīra* which is qualified by *gaṅgātīratva*. Both instances of the knowledge of implication produce the remembrance and verbal knowledge of the respective characteristic qualifying *tīra*.

An additional reason why implication is not accepted in *tīratva* in such instances as *gaṅgāyāṃ ghoṣaḥ* is that implication in the form of *gaṅgāpadaśakyapravāhasaṃyoga* (conjunction of the stream, the denoted meaning of the word *gaṅgā*) is not possible with the universal of *tīratva*, bankness.

Muktāvalīkāra asserts that in a similar manner there is no denotative function in the determinant of the-state-of-being-denoted-meaning (*sakyatāvacchedakam*) also. The reason is that the knowledge of denotative function which is qualified by a particular characteristic produces the remembrance and verbal knowledge of that which is qualified by the same characteristic. Thus, the denotative function of the word 'jar' is known in jar which is the substratum of a particular characteristic, viz., jarness which is known.

Rāmarudra, however, first rejects this opinion of Muktāvalīkāra, pointing out that if the denotative function is not accepted in the determinant of the-state-of-being-denoted-meaning, then, there would be no fixed characteristic for the denoted meaning in the verbal knowledge arising from the knowledge of denotative function, just as in the verbal knowledge arising from the knowledge of implication there is no fixed characteristic for the implied meaning. But, in the end, Rāmarudra shows that even if denotative function is not accepted in the determinant of the-state-of-being-denoted-meaning, there is a fixed characteristic for the denoted meaning for the verbal knowledge arising from the knowledge of denotative function.

So far *lakṣaṇā* in the form of direct relation of denoted meaning was explained. There is another kind of implication in the form of indirect relation of denoted meaning. This is called *lakṣitalakṣaṇā*. Such an implication is included in *jahatsvārthā* implication. As, for instance, in the sentence *dvirepham ānaya*, the denoted meaning of the word *dvirepha* is *rephadvaya*. Now, *rephadvaya* is found in the word, *bhramara*, the denoted meaning of which is bee. Therefore, the word *dvirepha* has the implied meaning of bee by relation in the form the-state-of-being-denoted-meaning of the word *bhramara* consisting of *rephadvaya*, which is the denoted meaning of the word *dvirepha*. Hence, in the verbal knowledge from the word *dvirepha, rephadvaya* which is its denoted meaning is totally abandoned and so this is an instance of *jahatsvārthalakṣaṇā.*

In connection with this discussion on implication it should be pointed out that, according to the old Naiyāyikas, the word which is said to have implication does not bring about any verbal knowledge, but only the remembrance of the meaning. The verbal knowledge of the implied meaning is brought about by the other word conveying the meaning by denotative function which is mentioned together with the word which is said to have implication. As, for instance, in the expression *gaṅgāyāṃ ghoṣaḥ*, the word, which is said to have denotative function, i.e., the word *ghoṣa* and which is mentioned together with the word which is said to have implication, viz., the word *gaṅgā* brings about the verbal knowledge of the implied meaning, viz., bank.

On the contrary, the modern Naiyāyikas hold that from such sentences as *kumatiḥ paśuḥ* (meaning, 'a dull-witted man is similar to an animal'), where there is implication in all the words, there arises verbal knowledge. This is testified by our experience. Therefore, they assert that the word which is said to have implication also brings about verbal knowledge.

Further, there is also an important discussion whether there is implication in sentences. The Naiyāyikas hold that there is no implication in sentences whereas the Mīmāṃsakas hold that there is implication in sentences. The Naiyāyikas explain their position as follows: there is no implication in sentences, since implication is in the form of a relation with a denoted meaning and there is no denotative function in sentences. Therefore, in the sentences *gabhīrāyāṃ nadyāṃ ghoṣaḥ* (meaning, 'there is a village on the deep river'), Naiyāyikas accept implication for the word *nadī* in *nadītīra* (bank of the river) and the meaning of the word *gabhīra* (deep) is connected with the river which is the part of another meaning, viz., *nadītīra* which is the implied meaning of the word *nadī.* If such an *ekadeśānvaya* (that is, connection with a part of another meaning) is not accepted, then implication for the word *nadī* is in *gabhīranadītīra* (bank of the deep river) and the word *gabhīra* just shows the intention of the speaker.

But the Mīmāṃsakas reject this position because if implication is accepted only for the word *nadī*, then, the word *gabhīra* will become meaningless. But the speaker certainly has the intention that the word *gabhīra* should also be meaningful. Therefore, they admit implication for the sentence *gabhīrāyāṃ nadyām* in the meaning *gabhīranadītīra*. In order to meet the objection that there is no denotative function (*śakti*) in a sentence and, therefore, there is no implication in the form of *śakyasaṃbandha* in a sentence, the Mīmāṃsakas define implication as follows: implication is the relation with that which is conveyed by a word or a sentence. As, for instance, that which is conveyed by the sentence, *gabhīrāyāṃ nadyām*, is that the river is identical with that which is deep, its relation is in bank and so there is implication in the sentence also.

But such an opinion of the Mīmāṃsakas cannot be admitted. This is because when implication is accepted in the expression *gabhīrāyām nadyām* as a whole, there cannot be any verbal knowledge in which *ghoṣaḥ* is qualificand and *gabhīranadītīravṛttitva* is qualifier since there is no word which brings about the knowledge of the-state-of-being-superstratum. Hence, implication cannot be accepted in the sentence.

6. *Nyāya* Theory of Interpretation

These discussions on implication provide us, with a sound basis for developing a *Nyāya* theory of interpretation. We have already pointed out that, according to *Nyāya*, the implied meaning should be related to the denoted meaning. Thus, in the stock example of 'there is a village on the Ganges (*gaṅgāyām ghoṣaḥ*)', the denoted meaning of Ganges is the flow of water. The implied meaning is the bank. Now, bank is connected with the flow of water. In *Nyāya* categories the connection between the flow of water and the bank is in the form of the relation of conjunction. This just means that the flow of water touches, or is conjoined with the bank. So, the implied meaning of the bank is in this way connected with the bank.

This connection between the denoted meaning and the implied meaning is crucial for a theory of interpretation. This is because, on the one hand, it presupposes that the interpreter understands the denoted or primary meaning of the text. This is the starting point of all kinds of interpretation. If a person does not understand the primary meaning of the text, he cannot start the enterprise of interpretation. In other words, the most fundamental duty of the interpreter is to equip himself towards an understanding of the primary meaning of the text. For this purpose he has to make use of whatever means available, such as grammar, philology, etc.

It is only when one is reasonably sure of the primary meaning of the text can one begin an interpretation of the text leading to the implied meaning.

On the other hand, by stipulating that the implied meaning should be connected with the denoted meaning, *Nyāya* imposes also certain limits on the extent of the implied meanings. First of all, an implied meaning cannot be just arbitrary: it cannot be totally divorced from the primary meaning of the text. If it is totally disconnected with the denoted or the primary meaning of the text, then it is not an instance of implied meaning but just arbitrary fanciful guess. Thus, in the *Nyāya* view an interpretation can never be purely subjective. In modern jargon the text may be free from the author at a particular time, but at no time an interpretation can be free from the text.

This attitude towards the process of interpretation has definite advantages. On the one hand, *Nyāya* never disparages the meaning of the text as intended by the author whatever may be the difficulties encountered in determining it. This also points to the fact that unlike some of the contemporary western theoreticians, the *Naiyāyikas* never give up the hope of arriving at the meaning of a text as intended by its author. Yet, *Nyāya* does not believe that the whole enterprise of the interpretation stops at the understanding of the meaning of the text as it is given to it by its author. It gives ample scope to delve deeply into all the possibilities of giving further meanings to the text. It only stipulates that such meaning cannot be purely arbitrary. This meaning should be based on, or connected with, the primary meaning and it is the ingenuity of the interpreter to find out the possible connections of the primary meaning. In this way the whole attempt of interpretation becomes both challenging and imaginative.

7. Conclusion

The avenues for applying such a theory of interpretation in the present context of classical Indian studies are quite attractive and significant. Today there is much confusion regarding the role of classical Indian culture as a whole and particularly about its values in contemporary India. There are, on the one hand, those who would like the classical Indian cultural traditions to be abandoned totally in favour of the technological culture of today. There are others who would want the early Indian traditions preserved even in their eccentricities which their protagonists tend to consider even as essential. In fact, such confrontations between various attitudes towards classical Indian culture need not even arise, if the *Nyāya* theory of interpretation is accepted and applied.

While there are many valuable elements in the early Indian traditions, which are the common heritage of the human society as a whole, it is equally true that the elements which are outdated and hardly consonant with rational thinking should be abandoned. Here also the meaning of the broad text of the Indian culture in general has to be understood before its implied meanings can be drawn out. In fact, such has been also the hallmark of the great works of the modern Indian interpreters of our classical tradition. Aurobindo, Vivekananda, or Radhakrishnan may not have explicitly developed a theory of interpretation but still they have blazed a trial of understanding of classical Indian traditions adapting them to their existential needs and aspirations; implied in their works is also a theory of interpretation which first tries to understand the broad text of Indian culture and then examines its implication for contemporary situations.

A *Nyāya* theory of interpretation has, in this way, broad applications which call forth both accuracy and originality in the handling of texts. There is no doubt that the consistent application of these theories which we have drawn from the *Nyāya* philosophy of language, in general, and of implication, in particular, can go a long way in enlightening our minds with regard to the problems of Indian philosophy as well as of Indian culture.

Journal of Dharma 30, 3 (July-September 2005), 303-320

INTERPRETATION OF RELIGIOUS SCRIPTURES FROM ASIAN CONTEXT

Thomas Kadankavil◆

1. Introduction

The thrust of this essay is to explore the possibilities of evolving a new universal hermeneutics for the Sacred Scriptures of world religions, giving importance to the distinctive factors of the living context of the nations in which these religious texts have been accepted as sacred. This may lead us to the distinction of a restrictive sense of the text related to the author, the cultural background, the life style and the self-training of the listeners, the exigencies of the time which urged the prophets to be very emphatic, and selective in their spiritual utterances and a significance which an interpreter identifies as having a universal appeal cutting across the barriers of place and epoch. If this assumption could be recognized as a functional hypothesis the new hermeneutics would become the meeting point of the world religions as well as the followers of these religions.

The hermeneutical task is, of course, both scientific and pneumatic at the same time. The pneumatic element makes it a search into one's faith. A committed believer in a deposit of faith undertakes the historical hermeneutical process with the attitude of Anselm, namely, "I believe so that I may understand." Here one can only speak from within the circle of his faith-content. But as a scientific method, if evolved through a comparative study of different religious hermeneutics, a larger area of common agreement on principles of interpretation in understanding the scriptures of world religions could be hoped for.

Hermeneutics may be understood as formulating a set of canons of exegetical interpretation or as exegesis itself as the operation of decoding, along with its result or simply as theology. All religious faiths have developed their theologies and if we restrict our understanding of hermeneutics as theology, it is possible to have a number of particular hermeneutics in the context of Jewish, Hindu, Christian, Islam, and other

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major world religions. This essay proposes to limit its scope of reflection to Christian and Hindu theologies and to draw out a set of canons of exegetical interpretation, which could be applied in the interpretation of any religious scripture.

2. Perspectives on Hermeneutics

Aristotle's conception of hermeneutics in his *Peri Hermeneias* is very broad in the sense that it stands for any linguistic enunciation affirming or denying anything to anything. Here hermeneutics is the enunciation of the comprehension of a term or a text. In the tradition that is coming down to us from Friedrich Schleiermacher, we have the conceptualization that identifies theology with hermeneutics. In the philosophical circle, H. G. Gadamer, to be brief at the risk of oversimplification, conceives hermeneutics as a sort of ontology, that is, he permits a teeming anarchy of every sort of reading, exempting itself from all analytical criticism. Paul Ricoeur, assigning hermeneutics the task of deciphering the 'double meaning' of the text, develops a conceptualization that obviously goes beyond the notion of a theological hermeneutics. The biblical hermeneutics in the West limits itself to the theological hermeneutics and to the method of exegetical interpretation of the Christian Scriptures.[1]

3. Hermeneutics from the 'Third World'

In his Introduction to *Voice from the Margin*, the editor R. S. Sugirtharajah makes a critical remark about the lack of recognition among the Western academic circles concerning the contribution of the scholars from the 'Third World'. He writes:

> To date, biblical interpretation has been exclusively in the hands of male Euro-American scholars. Their academics and scholarly guilds have been the arena where hermeneutical theories, interpretative constructs and exegetical discourses were worked out, and from where they were exported to other cultures and contexts as having universal validity. Asians, Latin Americans, Africans, Afro-

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[1] Clodovis Boff, "Hermeneutics: Constitution of Theological Pertinency," in *Voices from the Margin*, R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., New York: Orbis Books, 1991, 10-12.

> Americans and Native Americans were excluded both for their concerns and as producers of knowledge.[2]

The term 'Third World' referred to here is a theological neologism for God's own people. It is not merely a geographical connotation referring to the countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, but it is something that happens wherever and whenever socio-economic exploitation and dependence in terms of race, class, or sex generates political and cultural slavery, fermenting thereby a new peoplehood.[3] This indicates that today hermeneutics has to address the wider context of religious pluralism and the 'third world' of the new people.

4. Biblical Interpretation

4.1. Message and Audience

Most of the languages of the Sacred Scriptures in which they were written are already dead, though the message they contain are still alive, a message that claims to speak to all generations of all times. It is unlikely that the hermeneutists from among those who have accepted the faith vision behind the Bible and those who are outside the circle of believers to see the purpose, method, and the findings they arrive at as identical or even similar. While the believers who hold a universalistic outlook concerning the ambience of biblical texts accept it, the non-believers are naturally tempted to challenge the wisdom of such an interpretation.

4.2. Insider and Outsider

Let us take, for example, the interpretation given to John 12:24: "Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." The Greeks who wanted to meet Jesus were gentiles outside of the Jewish circle of faith. Jesus' prophetic declaration of his death is interpreted in a hermeneutical context as his desire to transcend the limitations of his human condition of Jewishness. "He did not want his Jewishness to become a limiting factor for his elevated and transformed human nature to operate beyond the barriers of his own religion."[4] Neither for a Jew nor for a non-Christian what came out of this exegesis could be the true meaning of the saying attributed to Jesus. This may lead to the question whether it is possible to have different types of hermeneutics, one for the 'within' and the other for the 'outsider' of the fold. Even if such a question was not alive in the past, nor had anyone worked out anything along this line, it still remains a possibility to be worked out. As a rule, all religious scholars have done their share of exegesis of their sacred texts for the purpose of making their religion meaningful and relevant both for themselves and for the outsiders.

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[2] Boff, "Hermeneutics: Constitution of Theological Pertinency," 2.

[3] Boff, "Hermeneutics: Constitution of Theological Pertinency," 3.

[4] Joseph Pathrapankal, *Text and Context: Interpretation of the Word*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1993, 12.

4.3. Faith and Historical Study

A glance through the history of the theoretical positions Christians have adopted in the scholarly world of scriptural studies would reveal the constraining parameters under which the Christian hermeneutists had laboured in the past. The primary concern was the way in which a Scripture functions as source of our knowledge about God and God's self-disclosure. The importance of the sacred texts is that they are taken as the primary resource for discerning the will of God for human life, the key that unlocks the mystery of God's ways. In the Catholic Christian tradition Scripture can only be understood in the light of the tradition presented by the Church, while for Reformers 'scripture alone' is enough, for it has its own illuminating power, a position similar to that of the Mīmāṃsists in interpreting the Vedas. Here the primary concern would be the rules to be observed in exegesis. This led to the rise of critical biblical scholarship in the nineteenth century. For Protestant hermeneutics

> understanding Scripture required the study of (1) the structure and idioms of biblical language, (2) the type of literature represented, i.e., prose or poetry, history or allegory, literal or symbolic, or perhaps a particular genre found in the Bible, such as apocalyptic, (3) the historical background, (4) the geographical conditions, and (5) the life setting (*Sitz im Leben*). This hermeneutical tradition, with few but very important exceptions, continues in full sway into our own country.[5]

Faith and historical method are two basic assumptions in this hermeneutical attempt.

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[5] Duncan S. Ferguson, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1987, 5.

4.4. Concerns and Presuppositions

What should be the method adopted for the interpretation of the Bible is an open question even today. While the fundamentalist approach finds the true meaning in the obvious literal sense, the scientific method, looks for true meaning of biblical text in its author-setting, that is in the meaning which was intended by its original author. But, of late, this critical method gives way to the awareness that it is not really adequate for interpreting a text, which is not scientific, but religious, a text meant for personal transformation of the reader through his response of faith. The same is true of the other methods of biblical interpretations current during these years, such as the New Hermeneutics, Bible Structuralism, and Rhetorical Criticism, etc. The texts were given birth with an emancipatory intent and the methods employed for interpretation seem to abandon the *raison d'etre* of the birth of the very texts themselves.

Scholars themselves have started to criticize the present day biblical scholarship which has become a luxury, largely unrelated to the real struggles of the people of our times fighting for liberation and a dignified human living. As to the lopsided vision of the biblical scholarship a critic has the following to say:

> The ever-increasing technical complexity of biblical studies, with its formidable apparatus of textual and historical criticism, comparative grammar and philology, reconstitution of the historical background through geography, archeology, papyrology, its recourse to source criticism, form criticism, tradition criticism and redaction criticism, all tend to display a sense of complacency characteristic of a group of people who take it for granted, either that they do not have to think of a world outside of their own, or that their only task is to keep themselves busy with endlessly vivisecting the living Word of God.[6]

It has been accepted that the dynamics of contextualization is the best method to recognize the openness of an ancient text to the present and to the future. "Contextualization here means the transcending of the original context by which the text is made to speak to the context of the reader and the interpreter."[7] In this presupposition the text has not only a past history accessible to historical criticism, but also openness to the present and to the future, which far surpasses the past. As a matter of fact, the objectivism of historical method prevents it from appreciating the role the reader and the interpreter have in constituting the total meaning of a text and so it remains blind to the authentically new meaning that a text may have to acquire as it is read in ever-new situations. In this respect the Indian approach to sacred texts independent of the scientific questions about its authorship, period of composition, and historicity may appear to be more congenial to the world of interpretation of the ancient texts. The interest in contextualization process, in fact, became the most vital expression of faith in the redeeming power of the ancient sacred texts even in the present Asian context.

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[6] Pathrapankal, *Text and Context*, 4.

[7] Pathrapankal, *Text and Context*, 5.

5. Asian Biblical Hermeneutics

It is interesting to note that the first attempts for a comparative hermeneutics came from the colonial India. It could be traced from *Precepts of Jesus: The Guide to Peace and Happiness* by Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833). One of the Christian as well as the Mīmāṃsa views this book challenged was the self-sufficiency of Scriptures. The textualzed controversy between Roy and the missionaries had all the hallmarks of a colonial encounter between the invader and invadee.[8] This controversy introduced Scriptures also as one more subject to be investigated. The new hermeneutical principle adopted was that the texts themselves as well as their interpretations had to be subjected to rational analysis. The interpretative key has to be reason. If the text comes in conflict with reason, the latter had to be followed. "Employing his own version of historical-literary method, he was able to demonstrate how doctrines propagated by the missionaries were products of evangelical Christianity and totally opposed to the gospel represented by Jesus." Roy posited the Vedas and the Bible "as part of a larger textuality, manifesting one revelation in two separate textual traditions."[9]

In the postcolonial period the emphasis of scholarly research was shifted from the comparative study of Scriptures to postcolonial perspectives on scriptural studies, a challenge raised by theories like postcolonialism, which gives mediation and representation to 'Third World' people. How scriptures could be interpreted in favour of the less privileged or marginalized? Will it lead us to a dilemma of tradition and contemporary relevance of sacred scriptures? It is, in fact, by continuous interpretation that the tradition is to be kept alive. Moreover, the rich resources of the tradition are indispensable for the religious traditions to address relevantly the issues of humanity today. But the religious traditions seem to have isolated themselves from the issues and concerns of the society to move about in a self-enclosed world of beliefs and rituals.[10] The need of the hour is, therefore, to bring out the deep humanistic potential contained in the religious heritages.

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[8] R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations*, Sheffield, Academic Press, 1998, 36.

[9] Sugirtharajah, *Asian Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism*, 38.

The three main issues the underprivileged face in 'Third World' countries, especially in India, are pollution (discrimination on the basis of the rank in birth – *jāti*), poverty, and powerlessness.[11] Today this section is designated in theological discussions as subaltern groups. In India a section of this people, the most discriminated group, is known as *dalits*. Any meaningful interpretation of the ancient religious texts should reflect the experiences and concerns of these people at the bottom of the society.

When dominant hermeneutics in the field swing to the pole of transcendence or eternal life, the other side of the polarity, that is a life that is human-centred, liberated, contextualized, and in temporality slip into shadowy existence. A hermeneutics that would emerge from out of the lowly, inferiorly, or marginally placed situation of any group in the society will certainly be welcomed by all genuinely religiously minded people in our country as well as in all other countries in the 'Third World'. This hermeneutical move in the interpretation of religious tradition is today known as subaltern hermeneutics.

The need to develop such a hermeneutics in the present scenario of religious interpretation is now recognized among the theologians from the 'Third World'. Felix Wilfred identifies a few factors that distinguish the subaltern hermeneutics from the traditional one.[12] Among these the question who interprets occupies the centre-stage. When the right and authority to interpret the religious texts are transferred from 'experts' invested with public recognition to the subalterns, a 'de-construction', as

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[10] Felix Wilfred, *Asian Dreams and Christian Hope:* Towards a Subaltern Hermeneutics, Delhi: ISPCK, 2000, 248.

[11] Arvid P. Nirmal and V. Devasahayam, *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College, NY, 1-22.

[12] Wilfred, *Asian Dreams and Christian Hope*, 260-267.

Jacques Derrida puts it, of the religious tradition would take place in favour of the disprivileged and discriminated. In this new hermeneutical approach there would be differences in the very perception of religious reality, differences deriving from the difference in social location. For the dalits and marginalized in the society, religion is a matter of experience of the moments of joy, expiation of sins, and a feeling of catharsis through ritualistic and cultic interventions in the events of life and not, as for the elites, an acceptance of a belief system, code of conduct, or a well knit world view.

Another important distinguishing factor of this approach is the emphasis it naturally puts on the earthly needs of the community. Felix Wilfred writes: "Their life and religiosity coalesce to form one single experience, which gets reflected in their hermeneutics... Their religiosity is made up of the very stuff fibre with which life is made." This religious urge is characteristically different from the natural concern to meet the needs of daily life squarely, and make earthly life comfortable. "People who have been denied bread, free movement, social equality, and human dignity will turn to any direction from where they possibly hope to get these."[13] It is highly probable that their quest for a religious affiliation would be conditioned by its power to respond to their needs for rice, wheat, dignity, security, and other material necessities.

Another point for contrast could be the insistence of the traditional hermeneutics on written text in opposition to the insistence of the subaltern hermeneutics on the primacy of oral tradition. The oral carries with it the feelings, emotions, moods, etc., which derive from the power of sound and the spoken word. The textuality tends to refine and restrain these realities and expressions.[14]

6. Hindu Hermeneutics

6.1. General Outlook

(1). In the Hindu tradition the relation between the Sacred Text and its transmission and interpretation of its meaning was much stronger than it was in the Western tradition and in a sense the rules of interpretation were inseparable from the very understanding of the text. The philosophy or belief system behind the formulation of these rules was the very conditioning factor in determining the meaning of the text. This has come about from the traditional belief that Vedas are divinely inspired and are eternal (*Sanātana*), impersonal (*apauruṣeya*), and infallible.

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[13] Wilfred, *Asian Dreams and Christian Hope*, 263.

[14] Wilfred, *Asian Dreams and Christian Hope*, 266.

(2). The very term *Śruti*, meaning, 'that which is heard', or the eternal voice of divine knowledge heard by certain holy men called *Ṛṣis*, testifies to the belief that what is heard has to be orally transmitted. If committed to writing, they were written down exactly as heard, without any intervention of human authorship. Though the term *Ṛṣi* is fancifully connected with the root *driṣ* (*darśana*, to see), meaning that the truth is seen by the seer, the more authentic term to designate the text of the divine knowledge is *Śruti*, coined in connection with the theory of the eternity of sound and the belief that the ear was the proper channel for communication.

(3). The great bulk of hermeneutical literature in Indian religio-philosophical systems came out in connection with *Mīmāṃsa* (*Pūrva Mīmāṃsa*) and *Vedānta* (*Uttara Mīmāṃsa*). The classical interpretations of *Vedānta*, also called *Brahma-Sūtra* of Bādarāyaṇa, by the great teachers like Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Mādhva, Niṁbārka, and Vallabha reflect one or the other form of modern biblical criticisms. But the interpretational attempts of *Mīmāṃsa* seem to be something unique in the genre of literary criticism and so we shall take it up for a brief review.

(4). The text as absolute: *Mīmāṃsa* of Jaimini is a system of ritualism. It concerns itself with a correct interpretation of the rituals of the Veda and the solutions of doubts and discrepancies in regard to Vedic texts caused by the discordant explanations of opposite schools. It can be taken as an early form of hermeneutics, because of the special methodology it had adopted. This hermeneutics consisted in its mode of interpretation of the given text, namely the Vedas, the topics being arranged according to particular categories, such as authoritative, indirect precepts, etc., and treating the topic according to a kind of logical method, that is concerning the proposition to be discussed, the doubt arising about it, the first portion (*pūrva-pakṣa*), the *prima facie* and wrong view of the question and the refutation of the wrong view (*uttara-pakṣa*), and the conclusion. The nature of interpretation given here is an exposition of the obvious literal sense and not of any supposed occult meaning underlying the text as in the case of the interpretations of the *Upaniṣads* and the *Vedānta*. The implied presupposition of the system is that no external authority, neither reason nor God, is needed other than the text itself for its interpretation: the Veda is itself authoritative. The objective of the system was, therefore, to create a desire to know duty, which is already being revealed.[15]

(5). The technique of Aphorism (*Sūtra*): *Sūtra*, the Sanskrit term for aphorism, derived from the root *Shiv*, to sew, means 'to properly string together'. A great variety of ancient Indian texts were written in aphoristic form, requiring strenuous effort for interpretation. The aim of adopting such methodology was to furnish the shortest possible suggestive memorial sentences as an aid to memory of both teacher and learners in an age where paper and printing were unknown, and books were scarce. Brahmanical *sūtras* were, as a rule, dogmas expressed as briefly as possible. In grammatical *sūtras* not even a simple letter is allowed which can by any contrivance be dispensed with. Very often in these *sūtras* letters and syllables are often used symbolically to indicate ideas through minimum letters and words. Philosophical *sūtras* were characterized by great brevity and the rigid economy of words. It is, therefore, evident that the ancient religio-philosophical tracts are practically unintelligible without a commentary or a key to their interpretation.[16]

6.2. Claims of *Purva Mīmāṃsa*

(1). Jamini's *Pūrva Mīmāṃsa*, compiled most probably in the fifth century BCE, used *sūtra* style because that was then the accepted form of composition. It was used as a convenient method to formulate the manuals of practical systems of teachings whether in rituals, philosophy, law, or grammar. From the point of view of hermeneutics the *Vedāngas* developed for the proper understanding of *Pūrva Mīmāṃsa* deserve our special attention.

(2). The ritual world of *Mīmāṃsa*: The proposed aim of *Mīmāṃsa* is to investigate the nature of *dharma* propounded in the former section of the Vedas, *Karma Kāṇda*. Jamini, the author of this investigation, enumerated his doctrines in aphorisms in twelve books. The commentators such as

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[15] Monier Williams, *Indian Wisdom*, New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2001, 117.

[16] Williams, *Indian Wisdom*, 172.

Upavarṣa, Sabara, Kumārilabhatta, his disciple Prabhākara, and others speak of six valid means of knowledge (*Pramāṇās*), including the verbal testimony (*śabda pramāṇā)*. Bhaṛtṛhari, one of the earliest commentators, had developed the philosophy of Brahman as eternal sound from the *pramāṇā* of verbal testimony. Later, Mīmāṃsakas have developed various forms of linguistic philosophies including *spoṭa* theory to explain the origin of the eternal connection between sound and meaning. All these later developments in search after meaning attained through sound and other means of knowledge had their seminal inspiration in the aphorisms of Jamini.

(3). Perpetual connection between a word and its meaning
The fifth aphorism of Jaimini, as paraphrased by Monier Williams, reads as follows: "The connection of a word with its sense is contemporaneous with the origin of both. In consequence of this connection, the words of Vedas convey unerring instruction in the knowledge of duty."[17] Some singular speculations occur in Jaimini's system. He asserts the absolute eternity of the Vedas and declares that only eternally pre-existing objects are referred to in it. This theory is supported by affirming that sound is eternal, or rather an eternal sound underlies all temporary sounds. Based on aphorism 18, commentators propose the following two arguments in favour of the eternal nature of sound: (1) sound must be eternal because its utterance (exhibition) is intended to convey a meaning to others. If it were not eternal it would not continue till the hearer had learned its senses and, thus, he would not learn the sense, because the cause had ceased to exist. (2) If on the other hand, it continues to exist for any period, however short, after ceasing to be perceived, it is impossible to assign any other instant at which there is any evidence of the discontinuance of its existence, whence its eternity is inferred.[18]

6.3. The Six Vedāngas[19]

We have six limbs (*angas*) for supporting the claims of Vedas, especially the *Pūrva Mīmāṃsa*. They are *Kalpa* (ceremonial directory), *Śikṣa* (the science of pronunciation), *Chandas* (metre), *Nirukta* (exposition of different Vedic words), *Vyākaraṇa* (grammar), and *Jyōtiṣa* (astronomy).

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[17] Williams, *Indian Wisdom*, 118.

[18] Williams, *Indian Wisdom*, 119.

[19] Williams, *Indian Wisdom*, 171-212.

(1). The *Kalpa* denotes a kind of ceremonial directory or rubrics called *Srauta Sūtras* to be observed in the conduct of sacrificial rites. There are *Srauta Sūtras* for each of the four *Saṁhitas*, thus, making it a voluminous literature.

(2). *Śikṣa* (Phonetic directory): It is the science of proper pronunciation, especially as teaching the laws of euphony peculiar to Vedas. This comprises the knowledge of letters, accents, quantity, the right use of organs of articulation, and phonetics generally. The manuals on this topic were of great value for the persons who had to repeat *maṅtras* (hymns) as an essential part of their religious exercises. The following translations of the fifth and sixth *sūtras* of *Śikṣa* manual will give an idea of some of the points that form the subject of this science: "Heaviness (i.e., prosodial length), lightness (i.e., prosodial shortness), equality, shortness, longness, and prolation (of vowels), elision, augmentation, and change, original form, non-changing of *visarga* into a sibilant, regular order, the mixed tone, high tone, low tone, breath and sound, and both (combined), all this must be accurately understood by one who reads (or repeats) the words of Vedas."[20]

(3). Sanskrit metres (*Chandas*): Knowledge of the metre of each hymn of the Veda was considered essential to right use and proper recitation of *maṅtras* (hymns). In the introduction of Sāyana to the first hymn of the Ṛg-Veda we have the following instruction to show the importance of knowing the metre of a hymn: "He who shall cause anyone to repeat or shall himself repeat (any hymn of the Veda) without having acquainted himself with the name of the *Ṛṣi* to whom it was revealed, the metre in which it was written, the deity to whom it was addressed, and its right application is the worst of sinners."[21]

(4). Exposition (*Nirukta*): The subject of this Vedānga is etymological explanation or interpretation of different Vedic words. The work composed by Yakṣa is the only typical representative of the whole class of this literature. The first part of this work is a list of words and the second is an explanation of words in the list. When words are explained, Vedic passages are quoted in illustration and the author often enters into curious etymological investigations, which are, however, difficult to understand from the extreme brevity and obscurity of their style.

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[20] Williams, *Indian Wisdom*, 176.

[21] Williams, *Indian Wisdom*, 178.

(5). Grammar (*Vyākaraṇa*): Usually, the grammar of Pāṇini is taken to represent this Vedānga. It contains 3996 *sūtras* or aphorisms. It is fabled that Pāṇini has seen rather than composed his grammar and the aphorisms have been supernaturally revealed to him. For brevity and economy of words nothing can be more successful than the system in which this entire immense and intricate subject is explained. Though in the modern culture people look on a grammar of any kind as a necessary evil to be tolerated or to be accepted as a mere passage to its literature, the ancient Indian tradition, however, regarded it as something to be studied and elaborated for its own sake. Since the grammar had been developed as a limb (*anga*) of Vedas, Pāṇini allowed manifold forms and irregularities both to defend his rule and the overarching freedom of Vedas to be different due to its divine origin.

(6). *Jyōtiṣa Vedānga*: The object of *Jyōtiṣa Vedānga* is to fix most auspicious days and seasons for commencing sacrifices. One of the important ancient astronomical ideas is the belief in the importance of choosing auspicious days and lucky moments for the performance of rites and ceremonies. The influence of the sun upon atmosphere and soil made itself so manifest that it was only natural to infer that similar influences belonged to moon, planets, and stars. The supposed power inherent in their rays intensified the superstitious belief of dependence up on their favourable aspects for the success, not only of religious acts, but also of all the affairs of life.

6.4. Brevity and Eternity

Over and above the direct purport of the given text, the text may acquire additional nuances when reactivated in the contemporary context, for there were other accompanying factors such as the literary preoccupations for being in *Sūtra* form and other dogmatic assumptions, namely the text reveals eternal truth, which, in fact, either enhance or obstruct the genuine understanding of the text. In the case of Hindu religious texts originated in the *Śruti* period with rigid economy of words and brevity in expressions, even devising symbols for that purpose, there is justification for wider excursions through the jungle of the world of meaning.

In the case of the interpretation of sacred texts of Hinduism there is no question of the intended meaning of the compiler, because the author is only a seer who has faithfully transmitted what he has heard. When the content of what is revealed is deemed to be eternal the tools of communication would only be rendering a service for the approximation of truth and it is the duty and the right of the current seer to go beyond the limitations of the given text to the eternal truth. This way of looking at the text would give the present interpreter a fresh lease of unlimited freedom to discover the eternal truth anew.

7. Conclusion

As Hans-Georg Gadamer in his book *Truth and Method* argues, the hermeneutical task should go beyond the scientific investigation of a given text in an attempt to gain 'truth'. Moreover, hermeneutics should be an attempt to experience the dimensions of truth that transcends the sphere of the control of the scientific method. In short, the hermeneutical responsibility is more than the interpretation of an ancient text. It has to be understood as a scientific method allowing the text to reveal and enlighten the mysteries of ultimate reality through language.[22]

The pre-understanding, that is, the body of assumptions and attitudes, which a person brings to perception and interpretation of reality, or any aspect of it, makes a significant difference in the understanding of a Scripture by a believer and a non-believer. The role faith and history plays in the understanding of a text can be identified as essential factors in the reality of pre-understanding. This means every interpretation incorporates a particular prior understanding. A general principle we could formulate is that "pre-understanding may be open-ended or closed. True of its structure it may allow itself to be corrected and altered by evidence, or conversely, it may reject *a priori* anything which does not nicely fit into some preconceived mould." The reality of pre-understanding and its limiting influence on our perception are long recognized factors among philosophers. This will lead one to a modest claim on the finality of one's own position as regard his truth claim.[23]

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[22] Ferguson, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 6.

The pre-understanding appropriate for the knowledge of God is faith. Though faith is taken as a starting point, great care must be exercised to avoid its distorting influence. Though Ricoeur, through his concept of 'distanciation', stands out as an exception, it is generally agreed that some clearly articulated hermeneutical approach – a self-consciously chosen pre-understanding – is essential for the meaningful interpretation of a given text. The recognition of the presence of a pre-understanding in our interpretation of Sacred Scriptures and its limiting influence constitute the first step to accept parallel sacred texts and their hermeneutical struggles. It is true that the interpreter of faith must begin the task with a single limited perspective. But to be able to welcome a plurality of perspectives in search of knowledge of God through the interpretation of ancient texts, one has to acknowledge the truth that the 'internalist' position of a believer would be in many ways opposed to the 'externalist' view, which would endeavour to maintain impartiality and objectivity in the interpretation.

Bible is seen as the locus of revelation. Christian hermeneutics proceeds with the assumption that faith and history constitute the minimum requirements for a hermeneutic that makes possible a 'full understanding of the Christian faith'. There are, however, so many voices, so many competing traditions. How could one piece together a meaningful faith orientation that meets my spiritual needs and has integrity? Do the claims that there is God's presence in universal history render the special action of God in the history of Israel, and for that matter, in any other religion, meaningless? It need not be so. After all, the coordinating theme of the Bible, as well as of the all religious scriptures is the acknowledgment of the kingly presence of God in his creation and it could form the coordinating faith for a universal hermeneutics beyond specific religions and their individuating claims.

Two important issues the hermeneutics of today has to face are the reality of spiritually rich world religions and the urgent need of liberation of the marginalized. Do the Scriptures of the world religions give us the knowledge of God's rule where the oppressed are freed? The major religions, however, seem to remain very much outside the history of the oppressed (*dalit*) and their culture, struggles and sufferings, their movements, and their leaders.

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[23] Ferguson, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 6-22 offers a detailed discussion on the issue of pre-understanding and its conditioning influence on our interpretations.

Jesus' education, rooted in the Old Testament, could not help but create in his sensitive spirit and keen mind uneasiness about empty religion and social injustice. Hence, his mission has to be seen as a universal mission for the liberation of all those who are captives in any way, a mission proclaimed by all world religions, and the type of hermeneutics we are called to develop must be capable of meeting this challenge.

The presupposition and the belief in a set of unchanging dogmas precondition the possibility of free and further hermeneutical explorations of any given text in question. It is difficult to evolve a neutral exegesis, both in the Indian and the Western traditions, freed from the metaphysical assumptions of a particular religious tradition. New articles of truth such as the importance of passing earthly goods for the marginalized may have to enter among the eternal truths that the contemporary hermeneutics may become relevant and find new scope and direction.

The overwhelming concern of the article was a search for guidelines within which a constructive, dynamic and people-oriented hermeneutics could be framed for our contemporary situation. This essay, it is believed, has raised some issues from the point of view of inter-religious dialogue and poverty rampant in the Asiatic countries, though the attempt at answering them remains yet incomplete.

Journal of Dharma 30, 3 (July-September 2005), 321-336

GOD'S WORD FOR THE INDIAN FOLK

Towards Exploring the Indian Milieu of Biblical Hermeneutics

Paul Kalluveettil[◆]

1. Preliminary Perspectives

This study presupposes two basic realities which serve as foundations of Indian biblical hermeneutics. Hence, this introductory part is devoted to deal with them in a summary form.

1.1. Traits of the Word of God

The word of God enters human history as a dynamic event. Indeed, the Hebrew term *dābār* does not simply mean 'word' but thing, matter, happening, or event.[1] It is akin to the Indian term *śabda*, which always is related to the speaker. It is his/her voice. The person of the speaker is present in his/her voice. When the word is uttered something takes place. It changes the existing situation. Thus, the word of God is always dynamic, and never static. Isaiah compares it to rain that comes down from heaven and waters the earth, making it bud and flourish (Is. 55:10-11). Likewise, the word that is uttered by God will not return to him empty, but will achieve the purpose for which it is sent. It is ever effective and everlasting ("the Word of our God stands for ever," Is. 40:8).

The biblical *dābār* has an ever growing characteristic.[2] Once it is uttered, it grows and grows. At the beginning of creation, when darkness and chaos reigned supreme, there clanged the voice of God: "Let there be light, and there was light" (Gen. 1:3). This first word of God ever remains

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[1] Robert W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic and Word of God*, New York: Harper and Row, 1966, 1-71.

[2] Paul Kalluveettil, "The Inner Soul of the Word" (Malayalam), *Bible Bhashyam* 32 (September 2003), 7-15; (December 2003), 8-22, 33; (March 2004), 40-51; (June 2004), 9-14.

effective. Wherever and whenever there is darkness in any realm (physical, psychological, intellectual, moral, spiritual, financial, cultural, cultic, etc.), this word will confront, defeat, and destroy it by bringing the light there. This word of light enters the existential situation in an appropriate form. Thus, it assumes the garb of love in the context of hatred and so on. It remains ever active till the end of the times when the world is transformed into the Word (Jesus Christ).

One may say that the biblical word becomes 'worldly'. It takes flesh (Jn. 1:14), enters history and becomes historical. The biblical text is contextual. Thus, the *dābār* has to become an Asian/Indian word, addressed to our context, as it had earlier spoken to the people of Israel in their language, idioms, culture, and context.

The biblical *dābār* is a provoking and penetrating word. It can disturb the conscience of the selfish and the wicked people. The word is like fire before which human beings are like wood; it will consume them (Jer. 5:14; 23:29). It is like a hammer that could break the rocky hearts into pieces (Jer. 23:29). It is, indeed, a saving and judging *dābār*. Heb. 4:12 poignantly presents the basic traits of the biblical word: "The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

1.2. Basic Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics

The word hermeneutics originates from the Greek *hermeneia*. According to popular belief, it is derived from the name of the Greek messenger-god Hermes. It is believed that he invented language and writing, the tools of comprehension and communication. In hermeneutics we could find three basic directions of meaning: expression, explanation and translation.[3]

1.2.1. Hermeneutics as Expression

To interpret means to express. It is an act of asserting and proclaiming the message to the Indian audience in their existential context. The whole person needs to be involved in this process. One has to vivify the "dead bones," as it is described in Ez. 37, in order to liberate the word from its imprisoned state so that it can become a happening event in the present.

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[3] R. O. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadmer*, Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1969.

1.2.2. Hermeneutics as Explanation

In this second direction of meaning of *hermeneia* we confront the biblical text in the existential Indian context. It is the process of waking up the word in order to release its inner energy so that it can speak to the context. In explanation, one starts from the Indian context and in that light looks to the text, and finally, once again, returns to the context. This context-text-context dynamics provides us with the existential meaning of the word of God. It serves to make the word grow and become 'worldly', i.e., Indian. One may say, this kind of explanation helps us to rediscover the Indian context as biblical.

1.2.3. Hermeneutics as Translation

The third direction of meaning is translation. The term translation is derived from the Latin *trans* and *latus,* "having been carried across." The act of translation is not a simple and mechanical matter of synonym finding by consulting a dictionary. Rather, it is a demanding laborious process. The Bible comes to us from a world distant in time, space, language, culture, and beliefs. Thus, for example, the OT text reflects the world of Israel. Hence, it does not speak in the concepts and expressions that are of our world, our medium of seeing and understanding things, persons and events; hence, the need for carrying the OT text across the Indian world. To translate means to make the horizon of our Indian world of understanding meet and merge with the horizon of understanding in the original text. Only in this manner the Bible can come to speak in our own language. If this phenomenon of being carried across does not take place, the word of God will not incarnate itself in the Indian culture. Thus, the translation dynamics is the very heart of hermeneutics.

2. Land and India

Illustration of these preliminary principles disposes us to study the Bible in the Indian context which will make the word of God the Indian Scripture. Both the Indians and Israelites have an inner vision into the in-depth realms of earthly realities. Thus, the material things serve to lead us to the celestial horizons. Nothing is merely material or terrestrial. There irradiates the face of God in every created reality.[4] "The heavens declare the glory of God," exclaims the Psalmist (Ps. 19:1).

2.1. Land as a Religious Symbol

For the Indian sages everything is the abode of God, *īsāvāsyam idam sarvam*. They have unearthed the mystic consciousness of the convergence of secular into sacred. There vanishes the dichotomy of matter and spirit. The more one could visualize the cosmic-celestial *ēkarūpa* (single form), the more s/he can attain the integral humanity.

In both Israel and India, land stands out as an evocative and provocative symbol which can comprehend the whole reality. Hence, we would like to take land/earth, which is a powerful symbol, to explore the Indian milieu of biblical hermeneutics. Indians consider it as sacred, as *bhūmidēvi,* goddess earth. There pulsates the divine presence in it. For the common folk land serves as the unique medium and the most powerful and effective metaphor of *ātma sākṣātkāra* (self-realization) and *Īśvara sākṣātkāra* (God-realization).

One of the most enduring and vital features of the Indian tradition is the concept of earth as motherland. The magnificent *Bhūmī Sūkta* (Hymn to the Earth) of *Atharva Vēda* XII.1 depicts religious impulses of the Indian soul.[5] The hymn sings praises of the Mother Goddess Earth. She is "the ruling mistress of what has been and what will come to be" (1:1); the "bearer of all things, hoard of treasures rare, sustaining mother" (1:6); "the matrix of all things is Earth" (1:43). The following beautiful prayers addressed to *Pṛthvī* are worth citing: "Instil in me abundantly that fragrance, O Mother Earth, which emanates from you... that sweet perfume that all celestial beings are wont to emit..." (1:23); "impart to us those vitalizing forces that come, O Earth, from deep within your body... purify us wholly. The Earth is Mother; I am son of Earth" (1:24); "O Earth, O Mother, dispose my lot in gracious fashion that I be at ease. In harmony with all the powers of heaven set me in grace and good fortune" (1:63). "May the earth who is to us in the nature of a mother, hold us her sons close to her life – endowing self, protect us" (1). *Bṛhdhāraṇyaka*

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[4] James W. Heisig, "Symbolism," in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, vol. 13-14, ed. Mircea Eliade, London: Simon & Schuster, 1993, 198-208.

[5] A. T. Embree ed., *The Hindu Tradition*, New York: Vintage Books, 1972, 45.

Upaniṣad II.5.1 asserts: "This earth is honey for all creatures and all creatures are honey for this earth."

The main Indian ideas (within the Sanskrit tradition) concerning land or earth can be thus summarized:[6] *Pṛthvī* is the foundation, the basis, out of which emerges all that exists and on which everything rests. It is the basis of life. Man is of the earth and earthly. It is part of man himself so that man can no longer live without the earth than he can live without body. The earth is the mother of all humans, an object of worship and not of exploitation, an object of awe and not of curiosity or research. The relationship of humans to *Pṛthvī* has to be that of experiential, affectional, and devotional orders. One who has not got *Bhūmi* is like one who is illicitly denied the nearness of mother. How that person can find his/her God? Where s/he can live? Thus, earth is the necessary medium for *āthma sākṣātkāra* (self-realization) and *Īśvara sākṣātkāra* (God-realization). Humans are destined to enjoy the blessings of the earth, because the earth is their home, their own family, and their body.

2.2. Land and the Socio-Political Situation

The Constitution of India in its Preamble states: "We the people of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic and secular to all its citizens: justice, social, economic and political liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, equality of status and of opportunity, and to promote them all fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of nation." In Articles 14-18 it asserts right to equality, in 19-22 right to freedom, and in 23-24 laws against exploitation. Thus, every Indian citizen has a fundamental right for a place to live, for work, for education, etc.

India which is the fifteenth poorest nation in the world remains as the land of massive poverty and miseries. The situation results from systematic exploitations in different fields. In this predominately agrarian and rural society, a good percentage of people (about 50%) live below poverty line.[7] A great majority of Indians (nearly 75%) depends on land for their livelihood.

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[6] Raimundo Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience: Mantramanjari*, Pondichery: All India Books, 1983, 120-122.

[7] Charles Irudayam, "Land: The Root of Poverty in India," *Vidyajyoti* 69 (2005) 340-354; 486-499.

In landmass, India ranks as the seventh largest in the world with an area of 32,87,263 sq. kilometres. In cultivable land, India is the third largest in the world, with 41 percent of her land capable of producing agricultural crops thrice yearly – a feature that is unusual for most countries.

2.2.1. Rural India

Land still remains a fundamental asset for the rural folk. It serves as the primary source of income, security, and status. For the tribal people land is not a purely economic asset, but a part of their spiritual as well as economic heritage. The importance these people attach to the land that sustains them is much deeper than mere economic utility would indicate.[8] They hold land and forests as the centre of their life. They build their religious, cultural, social, and political life around them.[9] Thus, for the Indian folk, humanness means 'landed-ness' (i.e., to live in one's land).

Almost half of the rural families do not possess land, which is generally the source of the basic necessities like food and water. Eighty percent of land is with the twenty percent of the people in India. Thus, land ownership is concentrated in the hands of a few. In fact, there exist sixty million rural households that are totally landless. This unequal distribution of land seems to be one of the basic and fundamental reasons for the inequality in India. The World Bank Report of 1997, entitled, *India: Achievements and Challenges in Reducing Poverty*, points out that landlessness is by far the greatest predictor of poverty in India, even more than caste or illiteracy.

2.2.2. A Monstrous Situation

Unhealthy westernization and blind materialistic tendencies have almost extinguished the original symbolism of land in urban areas. Capricious endeavours to transform India into an industrial and capitalistic country have engendered enormous inequalities and outright injustices. The poor are more and more exploited and marginalized by the landlords. Thus, they, having been deprived of basic and constitutional rights, are condemned to lead a life of abject poverty. The poem *The Mask of Law*

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[8] Reddy Prakash, *Politics of Tribal Exploitation*, New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1987, 14-15.

[9] Felix Wilfred ed., *Leave the Temple*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 13.

and Order poignantly gives articulation to the rampant injustice in the present India:

> When a rich man owns hundreds or thousands of acres,
> While there are others who do not own an inch,
> That is not robbery,
> That is because we must, at all costs,
> Safeguard the sacredness of private property,
> Which means just reward for the labour of ancestors
> So that the descendants may not labour.[10]

Is not this revolting picture a crying scandal? "It is nothing short of a paradox that we should be poor while our country is and has been described as a poor people in a rich country."[11]

2.3. Vinoba and Bhoodan

At this deplorable situation, Acharya Vinoba Bhave gave form to a movement, *Sarvodaya Samag*, a loose brotherhood of those who subscribed to the ideas and ideals of M. K. Gandhi, according to which the members dedicated themselves for the non-violent reconstruction of man and society. Vinoba Bhave preached *Sāmya Yogi* social structure (*sāmya* means levelling the field), which holds that "all land, all property and all wealth belong to society."[12] He says: "As none can claim ownership of air, water or sunshine, so also none can claim that of land. Should somebody claim it that is due to a wrong idea which is irreligious. Hence, I have given the movement the name of moral revolution – *Dharma Pravarthan.*"[13] He stood for "an equilibrium or equality in society."[14] He, therefore, coined a new motto: self-realization through *Bhoodan* (gift of land); *Sarvodaya* through *Gramdan* (gift of village).[15]

Unfortunately, this movement, which wanted to extinguish the desire for possession among the rich and poor, failed to bring an enduring change in the mind of the landlords. There was no whole-hearted and organized endeavour to realize the dream of Vinoba Bhave. The fate of the landless poor still remains the same. At this situation a great obligation is laid on Christians who have embraced the ideology of the Bible. They are destined to make the symbol of land as the expression, explanation, and 'translation' of the Biblical word for India.

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[10] For more details, see Paul Kalluveettil, "The Indian Hermeneutics of the Word" (Malayalam), in *Mathavum Chinthayum* 66 (1986), 305-325.

[11] K. K Dewett, G. C. Sing, and J. D. Varma, *Indian Economics*, Delhi, 1973, 123.

[12] Acharya Vinoba Bhave, *From Bhoodan to Gramdan*, Tanjore, 1957, 5.

[13] Bhave, *From Bhoodan*, 6.

[14] Bhave, *From Bhoodan*, 9.

[15] Bhave, *From Bhoodan*, 63-67, 74-77.

3. Land as the Biblical 'Text'

3.1. Bible as the History of the Land

The whole Bible can be looked at and presented as the history of land.[16] This concept underlies in the various names such as *'adāmāh*, *'erets*, Israelite Kingdom, the Kingdom of heaven in the parables of Jesus, and the Father's House in John. The limitation of an article does not allow us to deal with the theme in a detailed way. Only few features are pointed out in this study.

3.1.1. 'Adāmāh Motif in Primeval History

This theme stands out as one of the main concepts in the Yahwistic account of Genesis 1-11.[17] The term *'adāmāh* literally means ground, soil, dust, earth.[18] However, the normal word to refer to the world in the sense of the whole inhabited planet is *'erets*.[19] Still, both terms are frequently used as interchangeable words.

In Gen. 1-11 the *'adāmāh* is seen as fundamental in every way to human life. Indeed, *'ādām* (human being) is very often understood and defined in reference to *'adāmāh*. To speak of one is to echo the other, since they are closely and intimately bound together as, so to say, bridegroom and bride, or mother and son. Before the creation of *'ādām*, *'adāmāh* had no orderly form, since there was no *'ādām* to care for it, till it, and use it (Gen. 2:5). Then, God made *'ādām* out of *'adāmāh* (2:7). Thus, he owes his existence, his 'whence' to *'adāmāh* as all other living creatures (2:19). To till *'adāmāh* was the vocation of the human being (2:15). The earth provided sustenance to him (2:9). Finally, he has to return to *'adāmāh* (3:19) out of which he was taken: "From dust *'adāmāh* you are, and to dust you will return." Thus, *'ādām* is defined in relation to *'adāmāh*, his 'whence', source of his sustenance, the context of his vocation, and his 'whither'. He worked on it, enjoyed its fruits and lived on it. At the very touch of *'ādām*, *'adāmāh*, like a loving bride, surrendered to him and fructified. Work was a joy and intoxication for human being. The sin of *'ādām*, however, brought a radical change in this relationship with *'adāmāh*. She was placed under curse because of *'ādām* (3:17). Their relationship was fragmented and subverted. To work on the soil was no more a joy and relaxation. Man, then, had to labour hard in order to earn sustenance. Despite all these *'adāmāh* failed to yield good crops; very often it produced thorns and thistles (3:18).

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[16] See the outline of the Bible from the perspective of land in 5.2.

[17] For a study of *'adāmāh* motif, see Patrick D. Miller, *Genesis 1-11*, Sheffield: The University of Sheffield, 1978, 37-42.

[18] P. G. Ploeger, *'adāmāh* in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, ed. G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974, 88-98.

[19] J. Bergman and M. Ottosson, "*èrets*," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, 388-405.

Gen. 4:1-6:7 depict the increase of human sin which worsened *'ādām's* relationship with *'adāmāh*. The earth turned against him and cried out to God for punishment (4:10-12). Then, God sent a flood, blotted out the sinful humanity, and purified *'adāmāh* (6:11-8:17). Noah became the new *'ādām* on the new *'adāmāh*. The primeval relationship of harmony and union was re-established. The *'adāmāh* became once more the loving and faithful mother and bride, who provided rest to the new man.[20]

History of *'ādām* in Gen. 1-11 is, thus, an interpretation of his relationship to *'adāmāh*. "The account of creation, of life under God and rebellion against God, of creaturely existence, sin and judgment, of human vocation and community, is all set as a story about *'ādām* and *'adāmāh*."[21] They belong together. He is born, lives, works, eats, does good or evil, and dies on *'adāmāh*. Thus, the human task gets its primary definition in the care and use of *'adāmāh* (2:5,15; 3:17,23; 4:3; 5:29). Humanity cannot escape its involvement with *'adāmāh*, nor can human existence be lived out in some other context. The nature of human being demands this definition: *àdām vis-à-vis 'adāmāh*, God has united them; hence, nobody should separate *'ādām* and *'adāmāh* (Mt. 19:6).

3.1.2. Land in Patriarchal Narratives

The concept of land adorns prime position in the Patriarcharcal stories. Calling Abraham, Yahweh promised him three blessings: land (Gen. 15:18; 17:8), progeny (Gen. 15:5b; 17:2,6,16,19), and the divine presence

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[20] The root of the name 'Noah' denotes 'rest', 5:29.

[21] Miller, *Genesis 1-1*, 41.

(Gen. 17:7,8b). One should not interpret the first two promises as material blessings. In the biblical vision there is no dichotomy of secular and sacred, material and spiritual, earthly and heavenly. One leads to the other; one is the echo of the other; one reflects the face of the other. Thus, one may say, earth is aureole of heaven. Abraham was called to experience God-realization through the medium of land and progeny. He had to find the divine presence in and through these realities. Thus, land and progeny served as symbols of Yahweh's presence in the life of the patriarch. In the same way, the third promise ("I will be your God") should not be understood as merely spiritual. It has material dimensions as well. Hence, the so-called division into material and spiritual becomes inappropriate in the Bible. The Holy Scripture is concerned with the total man, one who has body and soul, one who lives on the earth.

Yahweh imposed on Abraham certain obligations, only the fulfilment of which will qualify him to receive the threefold blessing.[22] He had to leave his country and people, and go to a place Yahweh would show him (Gen. 12:1). The divine command implied a total rejection of the present life of security, self-complaisance and the comfort of religion – the 'opium'-factors that make one insensitive and dull in the search for God-realization as well as self-realization. Practically, God was asking Abraham to become a 'landless' person, an *agathi* (one who has no resources or hope in life), a nobody, one who has nothing and one who is nothing. This 'landlessness' was a necessary condition for receiving the status of 'land-edness' as a gift from God.[23] Abraham was also asked to spend whatever blessing he had received from Yahweh, in the service of his fellow human beings.[24]

The concept of land in the stories of Abraham (as well as of Isaac and Jacob) illustrates certain facts. Land is a divine gift, for the reception of which one has to become a 'landless' person. God makes one a 'land-ed' person so that the recipient shall make others 'land-ed' beings.

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[22] Paul Kalluveetil, *Vachanabhashyam* (Malayalam), vol. 1, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2003, 94-108.

[23] The terms landlessness, land-edness, and land-ed man, etc., are borrowed from W. Brueggemann, *The Land*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977.

[24] This is the meaning of 12:2c ("you will be a blessing") and 17:1b ("be integral"). See Kalluveettil, *Vachanabhashyam* (note 22).

3.1.3. Land and Israel

Israel claimed themselves as the children of Abraham, the authentic being of both 'landlessness' and 'land-edness.' Yahweh called them when they were living in Egypt as 'landless', oppressed and exploited 'non-entities'. He liberated them and led them to a 'land-ed' life. The Book of Deuteronomy presents the theology of land in the life of the liberated Israel.[25] Their call was to live in the land of God, celebrating the divine praises. They were asked not to pollute the land by becoming unfaithful to Yahweh. They should not consider land as an end in itself. Rather they should hold land, which reflects the very face of God with awe. There they are destined to enter into the divine rest, which is the call of every human being. At the same time, land has to become a place of service for the unfortunate 'landless' persons. Israel was bound to dedicate themselves to the task of making others 'land-ed' persons. Their 'land-edness' had a necessary dimension of making others who are 'landless' 'land-ed' beings.

Thus, Israel's liberation denoted their 'land-ed' status. Yahweh liberated them so that they liberate others from the situation of 'landlessness'. Unfortunately, the people of the covenant failed to live up to their call. They held the God-given land as their private property, instead of acting as tenants of Yahweh, who declared in Lev. 25:23: "The land is mine and you are but aliens who have become my tenants." Since the land became a temptation[26] for self-service, self-assertion and self-glorification, it was taken away from them. Once more Yahweh made them 'landless' persons in Babylon. The exilic prophets demanded from them a re-commitment to Yahweh, who would, then, make them once more 'land-ed' persons. The post-exilic prophets, in their messianic utterances, foretold the coming of the Anointed One who would establish an eschatological kingdom/land.

3.1.4. Jesus, the Land-Giver

Jesus, the Son of God became Son of Man in order to show us how to live on earth as authentic human beings. In him the call of Adam, Abraham, and Israel found its complete fulfilment. The land metaphor, in fact, got its total realization in Christ. He became a 'landless' person in order to make us 'land-ed' beings. His very person embodies, so to say, the biblical metaphor of land. The main ideas are presented here in a summary form.

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[25] Kalluveetil, *Vachanabhashyam*, vol. 1, 269-287.

[26] Brueggemann, *The Land*.

3.1.4.1. Jesus, the 'Landless' Person

The concept of 'landlessness' is embedded in the personality of Jesus. Although 'land-edness' belonged to his essential nature (he was in the divine form and equal with God, as Phil. 2:6ff. state), he emptied himself by assuming the form of a slave. The Son of Man became the poorest of the poor (a totally 'landless' person) at his birth and death. This prophet embraced the life style of a 'landless' pilgrim, which challenged the 'worldly' perspectives on building up a 'land-ed' life on earth. The very purpose of Jesus' words and actions was to make the so-called 'land-ed' people 'landless', and the 'landless' ones of God the 'land-ed' beings.

3.1.4.2. 'Landlessness' as Land-edness'

Jesus began his ministry by announcing coming of the kingdom of heaven (land) on earth (Mk. 1:14-15). He demanded from everyone who would wish to enter God's land to become a 'landless' person (Mt. 16:24-27). Jesus' disciples have to become, like the Master, 'landless' persons (the last and least ones, servants of others, the poor, the mourners, the hungry, the oppressed, and the afflicted). Like him, they have to make suffering as glory, cross as crown. The only way to enter the land of God is through the path of suffering (Lk. 24:25,46).

3.1.5. Christians as Hermeneuts of Land

Christ's community is entrusted with a sacred duty. Like their Master they should live a life of 'landlessness' in order to make humans 'land-ed' people. Church is supposed to be a communion and communication of this proclamation. Their words and deeds must be expressions, explanations, and 'translations' of the 'text' of land in the context of India. Each Christian has received the sublime task of interpreting (*hermeneuin*) the symbol of land. Like Christ they have to become the personifications of the land-metaphor. The history of the early Church bears witness to this fact, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles and various other Letters. In the Book of Revelation, Christians are depicted as being engaged in waging a war against those who uphold the ideology of the worldly 'land-edness.'

3.2. Land as a Biblical Symbol

The study of the Bible as history of land in 3.1 has brought to light the symbolic nature of the land concept. For Abraham it meant an explicit sign of the divine presence in his life. The people of Israel discovered, experienced, and enjoyed the presence of Yahweh through the medium of land. Later, in the New Testament, we encounter Christ as the personification of the kingdom, which is God's own land. Thus, the biblical concept of land is the most expressive metaphor of the divine presence on earth.

4. 'Land' as God's Word for India

As we have seen, the land stands out as the most powerful symbol in India and the Bible. It expresses, explains, and 'translates' the inner soul of human being in both cultures. Land serves as the medium and metaphor of self-realisation and God-realisation.

In the Indian context, Christ, the 'text', has to assume an Indian garb; in fact, biblical hermeneutics demands it. Christ proclaimed the coming of the kingdom on earth. This kingdom has, then, a terrestrial dimension. We may call the land its symbol. Christ himself is the personification of the kingdom, God's land.

In the parable of leaven Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to yeast that a women took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough (Mt. 13:33). This can be applied here. The land-leaven of Christ has to ferment the Indian land, thus, transforming India into God's land. This is the mission, task and goal of the Indian Church. The teaching of Bible in India has to be oriented towards achieving this goal. Otherwise, Christians will be failing in their sacred duty; the Indian Church will be committing a grave sin, which will not be easily forgiven by the God of justice.

5. Towards an Indian Reading of the Bible

5.1. Preliminary Observation

Here is an attempt to present in a summary form a tentative methodology for studying, teaching, and proclaiming message of the Bible in India from the perspective of *Land* symbol. This outline needs to be carefully studied, discussed, perfected, and finalized.

5.2. Thematic Outline of the Books of the Bible

Part I: The Old Testament

(1) *Introduction*

a. Context: 'Landlessness' as the basic evil in India. In this situation we look to the 'text' (the Bible).

b. The land is the symbol of God's presence in the life of Israel, the medium of God-realization, the proto-type of the kingdom of God in Synoptic Gospels, and the Father's House in the Gospel of John.

(2) *The Book of Genesis*

a. Primeval History (Gen. 1-11)

i. The Priestly Creation Account (1:1-2:4a): creation as liberation from the chaotic, 'landless' situation. Man is created to lead a life in the land of God in the company of the entire creation.

ii. Yahwistic Creation Account (2:4b-25): goal of human creation is to 'cultivate' the land and live in it.

iii. Sin as rebellion against the divine design. It alienated humans from the whole creation. As punishment they were expelled from God's land.

iv. Chapters 4-11 tell the story of the cursed humans who multiplied on earth, polluted the land by their sins, and were punished for them.

b. Patriarchal History (Gen. 12-50): The promise of land as the blessing and the main theme of covenant in the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

(3) *The Books of Exodus and Numbers*

a. Israel as landless slaves in Egypt.

b. Their struggle to become 'land-ed' people of freedom.

c. Sinai Covenant as the manifesto of God's children who are called to live in the land as celebrative beings.

d. The march of the liberated people towards the Promised Land.

(4) *The Books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy*

These books prescribe the covenant life-pattern of the 'land-ed' people.

(5) *The Books of Joshua and Judges*

a. Possession of the land.

b. Distribution of the land among the 12 tribes.

c. Israel's life in the land as the tenants of Yahweh in the tribal period.

(6) *The Books of Psalms and Wisdom*

a. Israel's life with God in the land as singers of the divine praises, as protesting, lamenting (of sins), and beseeching persons.

b. The norms for Israel's life with God in the land as beings, "wise as serpents" (Mt. 10:16) and not as wicked persons who are fools.

(7) *The Books of Samuel and Kings*

a. Israel's life in the land of God, under the kings who were called to make them "lie down in green pastures" (Ps. 23:2) and to enjoy the divine rest.

b. Land as temptation and threat: disloyalty of Israel, and the warnings of non-literary prophets as Elijah, Elisha, etc.

(8) *The Books of Pre-exilic Prophets (Amos, I Isaiah, Hosea, Jeremiah)*

a. The prophetic indictments against using 'land' (in literal and symbolic sense) as an end, birth-right and private property, instead of a medium for service, memorial, and celebration.

b. The loss of the land and the life of 'landlessness' in exile.

(9) *The Books of Exilic Prophets (II Isaiah, Ezekiel, etc.)*

a. Call for repentance and words of consolation.

b. Oracles of salvation and return to the Promised Land.

(10) *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*

a. Return to the Promised Land.

b. Norms for new life in the land.

(11) *The Books of Post-exilic Prophets (III Isaiah, Haggai, Malachi, Zechariah, etc.)*

a. Call to rebuild the temple, the symbol of God's presence in the land.

b. Exhortations on living in the land as children of God.

c. Messianic prophecies concerning paradisiac land as God's future for His people.

PART II: The New Testament

A. *Gospels*

(1) *Introduction:* Jesus as the new Adam, who brings back the original order, rhythm and harmony in creation, who leads humans back to the paradise, the land of God, the heavenly kingdom and the Father's house.

(2) Poverty, the 'landless' context of Jesus' birth, infancy, and life in Nazareth – a challenge to the concept of a 'land-ed' and glorious Messiah.

(3) The temptation of Jesus as that of becoming 'land-ed' person according to the worldly ideology.

(4) Jesus' mission as that of *Ebed Yahweh* of Is. 42:1-4 and 52:13-53:12, who proclaims a life of freedom in the land of God for the marginalized, the oppressed, the exploited, and the outcast.

(5) The life style of Jesus as a 'landless' pilgrim.

(6) The pedagogical method of Jesus, the prophet
a. *Verbal:*
i. *Parables* of kingdom, servanthood and eschatological feast and banquet, which present the life in the paradisiac land.
ii. *Sharpe sayings* which challenge the worldly perspectives which focus on an easy and comfortable life in this earthly land.
b. *Actional*: Miraculous healings, feeding, etc.
c. *Purpose*: To make the 'land-ed' people 'landless,' and the 'landless' the 'land-ed.'
(7) The passion Narrative
a. Jesus' total *kenosis* (the abject and wretched 'landless' state, rejected by humans and Deity), which was seen as the only way to make humans 'land-ed' people.
b. Descent as ascent: 'landlessness' as 'land-edness', death as life with God in His land.

B. *Acts and Letters*
(1) *Acts*: Stories of the origin and growth of the Church as the community of Jesus which strives to live a life of 'landlessness' in order to make others land-ed people.
(2) *Letters*: Paul, James, Jude, and John exhort, encourage, and admonish the Christians how to live here on earth as citizens of God's land.

C. *The Book of Revelation*
The author depicts the life of the Christians who are destined to live on this land as members of the heavenly land, as a struggle against the forces of evil who try to transform the earth as the land of the devil.

6. Conclusion: Indian Land as the Land of God

We were trying to explore the Indian milieu of Biblical hermeneutics. A preliminary attempt was made to express, explain, and 'translate' God's word in the Indian context, and make it an Indian Word. The symbol of land served as a medium and metaphor for it. It is our hope that this endeavour may help to release the *élan vital* of the ever-living, ever-growing, and everlasting Word of God and make it an existential text for India.

Journal of Dharma 30, 3 (July-September 2005), 337-364

RECONSTRUCTING THE FOUNDATIONS OF VEDĀNTIC METAPHYSICS

A Pluriversal Model for Philosophizing

Raphael Neelamkavil◆

1. Introduction

1.1. Aim of This Essay

This essay is concerned with a satisfactory method for ontological reconstruction and integration of Hindu thought, bearing in mind the theoretical lacunae that resulted in centuries of controversies on Non-dualism, Dualism, Qualified Non-dualism, etc. For this purpose, I use here the bare minimum of fundamental ontological concepts that are commonly held by both the Upaniṣads and the different Vedāntic Metaphysics like those of the major Upaniṣads and Śaṅkara. Often I generalize them as Hindu Metaphysics from the point of view of the fundamentality of the theological principles I deal with, and for the sake of brevity, although the term is a partial misnomer for a highly variegated corpus of systems. I attempt to show what seems most fundamentally amiss in them and to point a way to bridge these lacunae.

The model proposed signals the need for further reflection, formulation and application. It may be called the Einaic Method from the viewpoint of purely ontological implications involved. By 'Einaic' (Greek, *Einai*, meaning "to be") I mean a form of philosophising that allows truth-probabilistic, continuity-imbued thinking that categorizes on (1) the Transcendental, To Be, (2) the Transcendent, Reality-in-total, and (3) the Transcendent-Transcendental, Reality-in-general, and subsumes reality-in-particular under them by implication. To Be is the highest and deepest Transcendental, which is not merely the aletheial Being of Heidegger. It has Reality-in-total for its general ontological locus and Reality-in-general for its epistemological and semantic locus. The study of To Be in terms of

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Reality-in-total and Reality-in-general I call Einaiology; and the study of Reality-in-total in terms of To Be as General Ontology. Reality-in-general is the ultimate, central, conceptual ideal that is ever realized in consciousness in an ontologically realistic and continuous manner.

In this age of postmodern thinking, I hold that whatever is proposed as derivable from any sort of thinking is brought to the fore and closer to the central – albeit also through what is off-centre – and, so, a methodological probabilism of the central, maybe via the central and the off-centre in philosophising, calls for probabilistic continuity and progress towards the central in thought.[1] The central in thought is already very much present in Hindu thought. Now, instead of supplying the off-centre to the existing thinking, I would like to attempt a probabilistic-continuous methodology for Hindu Metaphysics, by presupposing that the central and the off-centre are already the ingredients.

1.2. The Why of This Attempt: Indian and Western Reasons

Although the implications of the Transcendental and Transcendent categorial system will not be discussed here, it is important to mention why such an ontological attempt is undertaken. I would propose to call this model as the Einaic or Transcendental-Transcendent or Pluriversal Model. The reason for it would also explain why such an attempt is made in Vedāntic Metaphysics. Transcendentals are ontological conditions, in consciousness, for the possibility of there being anything and there being cognition – To Be being the highest and deepest condition of them all. The Transcendent should be the highest Entity: Reality-in-total that includes also the Divine. The history of Western and Indian Metaphysics and philosophy of man witness to the merits of bridging the never ending confusion between the concepts of the Divine and Reality-in-total as the theological and cosmological Transcendents, respectively, namely, *Bráhman*[2] and the world, and secondly also of differentiating between the allegedly Transcendental *Bráhman* and the Transcendental To Be.

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[1] See, for a detailed argumentation of this position, in my obituary-cum-appraisal article, "Bye, Derrida! Splendid Perseveres Your 'Unsettling Ambiguity'! An Appraisal of Your Influence on the Arts and the Sciences," *Advanced in Arts and Ideas* 1 (2005), 174-99.

[2] I would strictly adhere to the convention of using (1) the impersonal noun *Bráhman* (with accent on the first 'a') to denote the Impersonal Transcendent, which is the same as the impersonal noun *Ātman* (without accent on the 'a') in mystical

Similar is the situation in the West, too, despite its thrust after clarity of thought. I mention the example of the deep-seated dualism between the world and God in Heidegger. Although, after the example of Kant, Heidegger has famously differentiated between the Transcendent and the Transcendental, it is to be noted that Heidegger fell short of conceiving his aletheial Being as the locus of Reality-in-total. Earlier Heidegger had it as purely anthropologically aletheial. Later Heidegger has it as midway between the anthropologically aletheial Being and the cosmically ontological To Be, thus ending up in his infamous incapacitation of the Divine from being subject to the Being of beings! It is worth noting that Heidegger is blatantly antagonistic to connecting the concept of Being with that of God, for fear of incurring the insoluble problem of substituting Being with God. But, this has, finally, ended up in his disapproval of taking God as instantiating even the particular 'to be' of beings!

To quote Hemming paraphrasing Heidegger in the *Zürcher Seminar* (1951), where the latter was asked if Being and God may be posited as identical, "Heidegger's reply to this question is full of teasing, full of a dry, acridly ambiguous humour that plays with our own mishearings. He says that the answer hangs together with the 'Europeanization of history' and that 'being and God are not identical, and I would never attempt to think the essence of God through being'. He concludes I think very modestly about being with regard to its use to think the essence of God."[3] But there remains the one question: When the grounding-question surfs over against the guiding-question of Western metaphysics, namely, the question of Being,[4] does not Being ground also God, does not God become

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experience and (2) the personal noun *Ātmán* (with accent on 'a') to denote the personal subject. *Ātmán* is derived from *aṭ, aṭati*, "to wonder," "go," "walk." Hence, *Ātmán* is "that which moves," "the wind," "the moving spirit." It may also be from *an*, "to breathe," and *vā*, "to blow." This term has reference to the individual principle that "breathes" and, thus, subsists. *Bráhman* is from *bṛh*, "growing," "swelling," "developing." It denotes the principle that is the greatest. This could not be merely a Transcendental, but an actual infinite, namely, the Transcendent. Then the only way in which the Transcendental To Be is active in the Transcendent should be infinite conscious activity, which is absent in *Ātmán*. Hence, even by the origin of the terms, the breathing Self and the Greatest are not to be on par.

[3] Laurence Paul Hemming, "The Being of God: The Limits of Theological Thinking after Heidegger," *New Blackfriars* 85,995 (April 2004), 17-18.

[4] Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999, 5.

the eminently Being-thinking being? Heidegger falls short of answering this question, in his ram into the anthropological question of Being:

> Metaphysics answers this question always without reference to the being for whom the question arises, for whom the question is its own concern. The question therefore becomes asked in terms of highest being, that which is most stable, most present, most permanent about beings. The being which above all possesses life, is without death and at the same time without movement and which always 'is' in its being is, as early as Aristotle, understood to be God.[5]

As is clear to our imagination, a Divine who is not capable of being is a pure non-entity, a vacuous actuality. This ontological incapacitation of the Divine, on the part of Heidegger, has its roots in his inherited, unquestioned concept of the Divine as pure, unchanging, inactively active (i.e., unmoved mover!), etc. We should bridge this gap created by Heidegger, and our concept of the To Be of the (epistemologically aletheial and ontologically processual-aletheial) process of Reality-in-total is fashioned for this purpose. It happens to be useful also for a methodology for reconstruction of Hindu Metaphysics.

To bear out this position against Heidegger, direct references to Heidegger too may be given, where he badly differentiates between 'exist' ("stand out [in the conscious manner, never in the non-conscious but ontological manner") and 'is' / 'be'. For example, "The being that exists is the human being. The human being alone exists. Rocks are, but they do not exist. Trees are, but they do not exist. Horses are, but they do not exist. Angels are, but they do not exist. God is, but he does not exist."[6] In short, the Divine is not conscious like Being-thinking humans (!), and so, does not exist!

An examination of this clear-cut differentiation would have yielded much fruit for our discussion. But it suffices to mention that this problem is present in later Heidegger, so that we recognize how damaging to thought it can be if we refuse to connect To Be with the Divine and with Reality-in-total (of which the Divine is one of the infinite poles). I hold that the same difficulty is present in the concepts of *Bráhman*, *Ātmán*, and the world in Vedāntic Metaphysics. This paper attempts to fill the lacunae in this fundamental Indian problem.[7]

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[5] Hemming, "The Being of God," 23. Here Hemming refers to Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XII, VII (1072b30).

[6] Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, William McNeill ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 284.

1.3. Clarification of Terms

It is in place here to distinguish between a 'connotative universal' and a 'transcendental'. A connotative universal is more or less an epistemological and semantic entity. A transcendental is an ontological pre-condition that involves a connotative universal. The To Be of Reality-in-total is the only highest Transcendental. It is also important to differentiate a 'transcendental' from a 'transcendent'. A transcendental, an ontological pre-condition involving a connotative universal, is an ontological, non-conscious connotative realized in the many (infinite entities of a kind). A transcendent, however, is any entity that is connotable by correlation with others by the involvement of transcendentals. Any entity is a transcendent. Reality-in-total is the highest Transcendent. The Divine is the Transcendental Transcendent, since it is the highest conscious appearance of the Transcendental in the Transcendent. The Transcendental To Be is instantiated best in Reality-in-total, but it is consciously best instantiated in the Divine.

The method proposed in this essay is so named because (1) the ideal of To Be and universal qualities attached to the highest Being (the Divine) are nothing but the Transcendental and the transcendentals respectively; (2) the highest Being and Reality-in-total are both Transcendents; (3) since the highest Being is in possession of infinite consciousness, it has to be in the highest conscious possession of the Transcendental (To Be), and so, the Divine has to be the Transcendental-Transcendent. So, the highest Transcendent, which may or may not have the highest conscious possession of the Transcendental (To Be), is Reality-in-total, i.e., God and the universe together.

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[7] A clearer and more elaborate treatment of the problem in later Heidegger is contemplated. It is also proposed that the answer to it may involve the formation of a slightly different concept of To Be, than in later Heidegger. Then, the possibility of unifying the concepts of Reality-in-total and the Divine under this slightly new concept of To Be would be direct. The fundamental difference this new concept would make is to clarify certain questions of classical metaphysics, misunderstood since the Kantian, Pragmatic, Linguistic, Phenomenological, and Heideggerian revolutions in metaphysics.

This sort of clarity makes it easy for us to distinguish (1) Reality from *Bráhman* and (2) *Bráhman* from the Transcendental, namely, To Be, and the transcendentals, namely, universals / qualities. Now, the rest of the ontological project looks easier than in some of the absolutistic Vedāntic systems of Indian Metaphysics. This paper does not promise a direct deconstruction by applying the off-centre tactic of postmodernism; instead, it attempts what is more desirable, i.e., making reconstruction possible from within the context and arguments of the *Bráhman-Ātmán* Paradigm, by arguing for truth probabilism, which is theoretically derivable from ontology, and not from postmodernism.

Once again, to facilitate further work in this direction in Indian Metaphysics, it is important to take note of the definitional concepts. We have considered qualitative concepts as transcendentals, all entities as transcendents, human *Ātmáns* as transcendental-transcendents (due to their consciously To Be-level contemplative nature), the Divine as the Transcendental-Transcendent and Reality-in-total as the Transcendent. In the course of this essay, I hope to be able to show the necessity of these definitions for effecting the proposed reconstruction of Hindu Metaphysics in such a way that praxis-level justice is ensured for human beings on earth.

2. Ontology of the *Bráhman-Ātmán* Paradigm

2.1. The One and the Many

The questions as to why there are things and what they are in their processes have made any culture to think at the interface of (1) 'the many' that either appears to be or actually is, and (2) the One that may or may not be the underlying principle. These questions end up in further questions as to (1) how to overcome the difference between the many and the One, and (2) what is the inner nature or quality at work in the difference between the One and the many. The inner nature of the whole and the part is considered as To Be (of Reality-in-total) and the to be (of reality-in-particular as theoretically justified by To Be, Reality-in-total, and Reality-in-general). To Be is properly to be spoken of its locus, Reality-in-total. It exemplifies both Reality-in-total and Reality-in-general.

To Be, however, is taken as absolute changelessness by the whole Hindu tradition. To Be, naturally, pertains to the whole. The whole is unreflectively identified with *Bráhman*, on the double presupposition that the whole is the real and that the real is unchangeable. But, actually, the fact of experience that beings change need not imply that the real, here identified with the whole, should not change! This causes confusion as to whether To Be is to be ascribed to the Divine as *Bráhman* or to Reality-in-total as *Bráhman*. This meaning of To Be has even transpired into the concept of *Śūnyatā* in the Buddhist tradition. The history of it is so strong that we need hard Transcendental-Transcendent thinking and learning from contemporary ontologies and anti-metaphysical traditions to overcome the difficulties brought about by the long tradition.[8]

2.2. The *Bráhman-Ātmán* Paradigm

The way the questions are answered in Hindu metaphysics is after the image of adherence to the Upaniṣadic absolutisation of the *Bráhman-Ātmán* paradigm, like in every exegetical derivative of inspired scriptures. Everything waters down to this scheme, and the result is identification of the fundamental quality (To Be) of the Whole (One without a second, the *Bráhman*) with the final processual "limit" of the individual (*Ātmán*). This result is beset with methodological difficulties: (1) It presupposes a logic that is at times absolutely deductive, and at other times inductive. The deductively inductive point of view is almost totally lacking in it. It is absolutely deductive when it derives unwarranted conclusions from some presumptions concerning the nature of To Be as Transcendental and also Transcendent! It is absolutely inductive when it tries to compromise the concepts of the world, man, and God using the concept of *māyā*. (2) The quality (in fact, the verbal To Be, but interpreted as the absolute and unchanging existent) that underlies the impersonal *Bráhman* is not supposed to underlie the personal *Ātmán* at all, and so, the individual *Ātmán*'s aspiration to be *absolutely* united to the One, namely, *Bráhman*, is naturally and justifiably postponed to a later date.

But, the nature of and reasons for the *absolute* transfer of the *Ātmán* into the *Bráhman* state (at which the *Ātmán*, who is personal, becomes the impersonal *Ātman* [without the personalizing accent on *a*], which is equivalent to the impersonal *Bráhman*), in accordance with the *Mahāvākya*, "*Tattvamasi*," is treated only practically (morally and mystically), and not metaphysically! This becomes problematic, because how one's uniquely personal status ceases to be and suddenly takes the place of the impersonal *Bráhman* as an enigma. This transfer process, it seems, is not only not accounted for in theory, but also impossible to be accounted for without use of the Transcendental-Transcendent distinction. We will explain this after further discussion. It suffices here to say that logical and ontological dissolution of the *Ātmán*-into- *Bráhman* process holds the key to reconstruction of Hindu Metaphysics in a manner that makes this process ontologically possible by first making *Bráhman* and *Ātmán* capable of being acceded to by each other.[9]

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[8] I have attempted a similar but more detailed reconstruction of the Bauddha (Mahāyāna) Ontology in "Hermeneutic Ontology of the Integrative Ultimate in Mahāyāna: Yielding a Mystic Ontology for Interreligious Enhancement," *Advances in Arts and Ideas* 1 (2005), 86-114.

But, we do not wish to touch upon other traditional solutions like those of *Puruṣa-Prakṛti* and *Īśvara-Jīvātmán*. I presuppose that even in all these cases, the absolute superiority supposed to be the prerogative of *unchangeability* ascribed to *Puruṣa* and *Īśvara*, finally, ended them up in the same background concept as *Bráhman* for their justification, in which case *Puruṣa* and *Īśvara* had to remain anthropomorphic or cosmological relativisations of the concept of *Bráhman* for public consumption. Now, is *Bráhman* so absolute, and *Puruṣa* / *Īśvara* so relative?

2.3. Crux of the Problem and Its Evaporation in the Reconstruction

The *Ātmán*-into-*Bráhman* movement through realization of Wisdom as encapsulated in the principle "*Tattvamasi*" and other *mahāvākya*s is the ultimate solution proposed by all Hindu systems. In this world, the individual (*Ātmán*) experiences change and decay, but in *Bráhman*, the *Ātmán* experiences no change – a conclusion obtained by exclusive application of deduction or induction. This absolute general ontological difference and lack of mutual approachability between *Ātmán* and *Bráhman* have not been questioned sufficiently well, and so, the ontological consequences of this on the nature of *Bráhman* and the epistemological consequences of it on religious practice are not sufficiently mended. As a result, mystical epistemology is not properly exploited for the purpose of answering the question as to how to contemplatively and ethically overcome the seemingly absolute difference between the many and the One, so that socio-mystical practice is, in principle, made possible.

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[9] There is much process-philosophical understanding involved here. I would admit that this essay has a Whiteheadian, Heideggerian, cosmological, and mystical inspiration as well.

As is well known, *Ātmán* is considered by all Vedāntins as subject to empirical experience (*nāma-rūpa*) and *karma*. In that case it is merely the empirical *jīva*, within the same sense of the term 'empirical'. 'Empirical' has not been connected with the eternal here. One does also insist that the real nature of *Ātmán* is eternal. If so, *Ātmán* can neither change into the 'empirical' *jīva*, nor better itself from the state of being a *jīva* or *jīvātmán* into that of *Ātman* (without the accent on the 'a', and so, not the specific, but the absolute that has realized the proposed ideal state of identity with *Bráhman*). The problem here is double-edged: (1) Ontologically, this identity is not realizable; and mystically, there is a supposed experience of identity. (2) Both when we admit a connection between *Ātmán* and *Bráhman*, and when we separate them absolutely, a complete, ontologically absolute identity is not available. Then, why not admit only a never-ending, asymptotic process of mutual approach?

Instead of ontologically (and, thus, ethically and mystically) connecting the 'empirical' via reality-in-particular to the 'eternal', this problem has been set aside by the traditional, ascetically persuasive generalizations regarding the specific and the fleeting in experience – generalizations like *adhyāsa*, "superimposition," *māyā*, "(cosmic) ignorance," *ajñāna* / *avidyā*, "(personal) ignorance," etc. But the point of real or unreal connexion between these and the Absolute (where *Bráhman* = *Ātman* in an enigmatic manner) is still not made, and so, the problem continues to pose itself. We need, therefore, a viable concept of being real (in-whole and in-part) to connect *Bráhman* and *Ātman*. My suggestion here is that this problem will dissolve itself, provided *Bráhman* is no more taken as absolutely different from *Ātmán*. The Vedāntins do admit it to be true (*a-dvaita*, *viśiṣṭa-a-dvaita*, etc.), but by simultaneously maintaining that *Bráhman* is absolutely unchanging and unconnected and absolutely different from the specific. These two views are mutually incompatible. A realistic whole-and-part state of affairs, in which the part proceeds to become the whole is not advisable, since the absolute distinction – here of the infinite and the finite – is still present.

We need a theory in which *Ātmán* can ever better go on joining *Bráhman* but cannot become or enter into ontological identity with *Bráhman*, in which case the region of connexity between *Ātman* with entities, and *Bráhman*, is the consequent nature of *Bráhman*. Here, as

Ātmán never becomes *Bráhman*, nor becomes absolutely an organic part of *Bráhman*, we need, ontologically, to posit partial identity by similarity and partial difference by similarity between them – a difference that is not of whole and part, but of the Processual Entity that subordinates processual entities. In such a theory, *Bráhman* ceases to be the whole. It remains the Divine. The pure Transcendent, Reality-in-total, is the whole; *Bráhman* remains the infinitely Transcendental-Transcendent, all-pervading part; and *Ātmán* and other entities remain transcendents of various, mutually compatible, and concrescent parts of the whole. This alone allows place for other entities in the process of divinisation. A pure whole-and-part theory reduces other entities as unaccountable for in the economy of the *Ātmán*-into-*Bráhman* process. The concepts of *adhyāsa*, *māyā*, *ajñāna* / *avidyā*, etc., would recur in such a theory![10]

The questions that now remain to be posed are these: (1) How to integrate *Bráhman*, *Ātmán*, and the world into a Whole (Reality-in-total)? (2) How to effect the proposed reconstruction and integration in a way that the natures of both *Bráhman* and *Ātmán* are safeguarded without detriment to both and to other entities? These would naturally yield a pluriversal model, as would be expected by a metaphysician who believes in the final epistemological and ontological fruits, even of postmodern deconstructionism in ontology. Let us apply our principle of "partial identity and partial difference" to the whole paradigm proposed by Vedāntic Metaphysics and witness the solution that possibly emerges. We attempt this in section 3. We prepare the ground by analysing the epistemological background that supports the traditional Paradigm.

3. Epistemology of the *Pāramārthika-Vyāvahārika Jñānas*

3.1. Hermeneutic of Removal of Cosmic and Personal Ignorance

3.1.1. Fact of Ignorance

Wisdom in Vedāntic thought is perception (*vid-*, *veda*) of the essence of the Vedas, i.e., the fact of the 'Ideally Real in manifestation and ingression in the specific'; whereas in Buddhism it is continuous awareness of the transience of all constructs. The absence of wisdom and the absence of action in accord with wisdom are the results of ignorance (*avidyā*) of the essence of the Vedas. The process of removal of ignorance is discussed in a unique fashion by Sureśvara (a pupil of Śaṅkara) in his *Vārttika* (critical annotations on a group of aphorisms) on Bhartṛ-prapañca's *Puruṣavidha Brāhmaṇa*, which is one of the rare pre-Śaṅkara Vedāntic philosophical works that prescribes worship of the *Ātman* as *Hiraṇyagarbha*[11] for attaining liberation. This work is also the beginning of philosophical discussion on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, the most famous of the principal *Upaniṣads*. The work says so of the removal of ignorance and the place of the Veda (as *Śabda*) in the process of liberation:

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[10] This can very well justify the Christian theological position about the issue, too.

> "*Durbalatvādavidyāyā ātmatvādbodharūpiṇaḥ*
> *Śabdaśakteracintyatvādvidmastam mohahānataḥ*" (860).
>
> "On the removal of ignorance, we know that one (viz., the inner self = the *Ātmān*) on the removal of ignorance owing to its weakness, since the *Ātman* in the form of knowledge and (also) thanks to the incomprehensible (potence) of the words (in the Veda)."[12]

The Ideally Real in perception is at the same time considered as an Entity and as an Ideal. Here lies the reason for the insufficiency of effectiveness of the integration that the different Vedānta philosophies have claimed to bring about. That is, from this perspective issues the problem of the integration of the totally real-actual (*Wirklichkeit*) and the ideal-actual (*Realität*, in the sense of ideal-reified) within the *Brāhman-Ātmān* paradigm. As we proceed in this essay, the difficulties involved in the Vedāntic integration would be clearer, and the suggested methodological solution will be explained further.

3.1.2. Power of the Word (*Veda*) and Society in Removal of Ignorance

The power of absolutising – or not – ignorance is such that the individual cannot overcome it. We need others to do that, because an external agency or cause is a must for communication of the Word. Although individuals are themselves unable to do that by reason of their individuality, there is something at the realm of 'the between' of persons, i.e., in society, in the world, that empowers individual entities with the power of removal of ignorance. It is argued that this is because the Vedas are given in and through others, not automatically. Hence, we need others at every nook of our existence, for removal of ignorance. That is, we have *mokṣa* and *mukti* from the powers of ignorance only by intervention of the other in our lives. This is clearly enunciated in the following verse from *Puruṣavidha Brāhmaṇa* thus:

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[11] *Hiraṇyagarbha* means "Golden Germ." It is a name for Brahmā, who is supposed to be the earliest manifestation of *Brāhman*. It is also understood as "Consciousness associated with the collective subtle body" consisting of the different sheaths that function as the limbs of the Cosmic Soul, the sheaths being: *vijñānamayakośa*, *manomayakośa*, and *prāṇamayakośa*. Thus, derivatively, the term means Cosmic Womb, World Mind, and World Soul.

[12] K. P. Jog and Shoun Hino, eds., *Sureśvara's Vārtika on Puruṣavidha Brāhmaṇa*, Advaita Tradition Series, vol. 5, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993, 270.

> "*Agṛhītvaiva sambandhamabhidhānābhidheyayoḥ*
> *Hitvā nidrām prabuddhyante suṣupte bodhitāḥ*" (861).
>
> "(Such is the wonderful potence of the words of Veda that), even without their having touched the connection between the expression and what is to be expressed, (the ignorant ones) who are awakened in their sleep (i.e., ignorance) by others, wake up having given up their sleep."[13]

This verse recognizes the place of the other in the self-process. If there is no other, then there is no removal of ignorance. That is, it is not merely the *Veda*, but the *Veda* in conjunction with humans (and other entities), that remove ignorance. The *Vedas* and the *Upaniṣads*, and also most of the commentators and thinkers, do not seem to emphasize this communal-hermeneutic aspect of the process of removal of ignorance and attainment of *mokṣa*. Famously, the practical subjective instruments for attainment of *mokṣa* are morality and contemplation in most of the Indian systems, and also in other major religions and philosophies in the world.

Now, if we are to follow the suggestion of Bhartṛ-prapañca that the other is causally intermediate to the Veda and the *Ātmán*, then we need only to extend the concept of the other for an ontologically, epistemologically, and ethically most integral, logical, coherent, and just means of synthesizing Reality by use of the *Bráhman-Ātmán* paradigm. The other can be anyone, even the one who is directly inessential to one's perception of the highest truth, because, ontologically, epistemologically, and ethically, there is only partial identity and partial difference between them. This aspect integrates into the *Ātmán*-to-*Bráhman* process what is central in knowledge process and also what is not so central in it, of which deconstructionists seem to favour only the latter! This is potent of bestowing greater adequacy to the theory and its praxis. The question 'Why so?' is, thus, being supplemented with the question 'Why not so?', and the result is elucidation of the problem by filling the lacunae that were considered marginal or insignificant. I believe this has been made possible by the principle of partial identity and partial difference.

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[13] Jog and Hino, eds., *Sureśvara's Vārtika on Puruṣavidha Brāhmaṇa*, 270.

3.1.3. What Has Been Done to Solve the Difficulties?

The concepts of *Saguṇa Bráhman*, *Jīvātman*, etc., in Rāmānuja, Madhva, etc., have been proposed as partial solutions, against the background of the problem of *Pāramārthika* and *Vyāvahārika Jñānas*. There appear in a chain the *tuccha* ("trifling"), *prātibhāsika* ("existing only in appearance"), *vyāvahārika* ("practical" or "pragmatic"), and *pāramārthika* ("pertaining to the highest of whole meaning / truth") *jñāna*s as modifications of *jñāna*. The former three types, however, are not considered to be *jñāna*s proper because of the absoluteness ascribed to the *pāramārthika*. So, they can be grouped as pragmatic and the fourth as absolute. This reduces the 'four-truths' theory into a 'double truth' theory. Thus, the question of the fundamentality of the *Ātmán*-to-*Bráhman* process and the problems involved in the paradigm do not give way, since these thinkers too have reified or idealized *Ātmán* and *Bráhman* beyond redemption, by adhering to the alleged absoluteness (from which there is no return, since in it there is the absolute experience of identity of *Bráhman* and *Ātmán*) of the *pāramārthika jñāna*.

3.1.4. What Is to Be Done to Solve the Difficulties Together?

After we unearth the realized, actual meaning of the concept of metaphysical Transcendentality (idealization at the level of To Be) of the *Bráhman-Ātmán* paradigm from the points of view of *Advaita* and other important schools, we may also advance beyond them in search of certain improvements in the understanding of the integral vision. This advance would be to integrate the Transcendentality of *Bráhman* with the Transcendent quality of all beings, i.e., *Bráhman*, individuals, and the universe.

This requires us to look into the nature of the epistemology central to Vedic, Upaniṣadic, and Vedāntic thoughts, namely, the concept of the Double Truth, i.e., the *pāramārthika* and *vyāvahārika jñāna*s. We need to integrate these into a mutually continuous epistemology of higher wisdom and lesser wisdom, and as a result, we should follow a Transcendental-Transcendent ontology, epistemology, and ethics that integrate *Bráhman* and *Ātmán* in a mutually continuous manner. This is nothing but integration of the phenomenal (inclusive of both the actual and the constructed) in unison with the noumenal, at the level of Reality-in-general, which is the conceptual-processual integration of the specific with the whole at the level of the To Be of Reality-in-total. The system that results will be more adequate for meeting the ontological, liberative, and social needs of humankind, than we have in the above-said systems. Attempting only a deconstruction of all sorts of systems will only continue to bring back the off-centre to the central and make possible an ever more truth probabilistic system. Something similar is the result we project. But, if there is a way of integrating the central with the ‘between’ in being, knowing and acting, what will be the characteristics of such a system? This question we try to answer in the sections and sub-sections that follow after treating its epistemology. We begin from the very epistemological foundations of the *Bráhman-Ātmán* paradigm. It will now be clear that the paradigm is based on the naïveté in the absolutisation of the concepts of *Pāramārthika* and *Vyāvahārika Jñāna*s.

3.2. *Pāramārthika* and *Vyāvahārika Jñānas* as Wisdom

3.2.1. What is Wisdom?

Genuine wisdom is the continuously conscious and all-inclusive perception (*veda*) – while one is in contemplation or action – of the infinite and eternal factuality of “That thou art,” and other such *Mahāvākya*s. This state of wisdom is *pāramārthika jñāna*. This alone is real wisdom. Let us now take a look at the context, i.e., of the three states before the highest, the *turīya* / *caturtha*, “the fourth,” namely, *jāgrat* (“waking”), *svapna* (“dreaming”), and *suṣupti* (“deep sleep”) – and the way in which *pāramārthika jñāna* is held superior:

> “*Jāgratsvapnasuṣupteṣu ghaṭo☒yamiti savidaḥ*
> *Vyavadhānam na cehāsti sadbhavāsākṣitaḥ*’ (871).
>
> “In the knowledge ‘This is a pot’ (which occurs) in the states of waking, dream and deep sleep, there is some delimitation [note: Namely, this pot exists on such and such a thing for such and such a period]; (but such d[e]limitation) does not exist here (in respect of the knowledge of the *Ātman*), since (the *Ātman* itself) is the seer of the presence and absence of that (thing).”[14]

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[14] Jog and Hino, eds., *Sureśvara’s Vārtika on Puruṣavidha Brāhmaṇa*, 273.

Seeing things *sub specie aeternitatis*, therefore, is the wisdom the seer supposedly attains. But one forgets the fact that seeing things *sub specie aeternitatis* is itself not the very ideal, abstract, absolute *pāramārthika jñāna*, but instead, it does only imply such an ideal. It is, in fact, a continuous process in imitation of the transcendentally posited abstract state of knowledge, which is termed the highest. This should be so, because the transcendentally posited abstract ideal is never ontologically or consciously realized in a finite being, and so, the *Ātmán* never fully transforms into *Ātman*. How is this knowledge to be continuous in a person of human form, however long one is in the *samādhi* of the eternal point of view? Is it an eternal point of view or an eternalising one? How does one jump from being the empirical to the eternal self?

3.2.2. *Pāramārthika* and *Vyāvahārika Jñānas*

According to Sureśvara, since the experience "I am *Bráhman*" in the more perfect state of deep sleep is inferred only after deep sleep, there is no way of establishing the existence of the experiencer at the earlier (deep sleep) moment by usual means of perception.[15] What, then, about the fourth state? One important thing that is forgotten here is the simple logic of supplementing every conclusion of one person with those of others – at the level of the To Be of Reality-in-total and at the realm of Reality-in-general – for ever-greater truth probability. Just as all specific logical formulations are susceptible to error, so also is every experience of the individual, however deeply one is immersed in the fourth state. The point of view had in Reality-in-general is never the absolute, but it is ever better than the empirical. We do not find this sort of an epistemology in Vedāntic Metaphysics.

Now, according to the Vedāntas, whatever be the experience and resultant logically formulated knowledge we have had in the first three states (waking, dreaming, and deep sleep), they are susceptible to error. Different authors call this variety of truth as *vyāvahārika jñāna*. It may also be called *parokṣa* (indirect) *jñāna*.

But, the sort of *jñāna* had in *turīya* is considered to be absolute: since this state is the ultimate, the *jñāna* in that state should also be such. This is called *pāramārthika jñāna*, also called *aparokṣa* (direct) *jñāna*. Directness and absoluteness of truth are to be found only in such knowledge. Now, suppose we can establish that even *pāramārthika* is not absolute, then we know also that *turīya* is not absolute. This would show that the only possible fact about the two types of knowledge, namely, that there is only partial identity between the two, is the source of confusion and of possible integration between absolute wisdom and finite knowledge.

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[15] Jog and Hino, eds., *Sureśvara's Vārtika on Puruṣavidha Brāhmaṇa*, 274.

4. Integration by Ontological and Epistemological Pluriversality

4.1. Key to Reconstruction: The Transcendental, the Specific Transcendentals, the Transcendent, the Transcendent Divine and the Specific Transcendents

4.1.1. Nature of the Confusion in the Concept of *Brā́hman*

As we have already begun to see at different stages of our inquiry, the confusion in the case of the concept of *Brā́hman* is due to a threefold interpretation prejudiced at times by the need to idealize, and at times by the need to reify:

(1) At times, *Brā́hman* is taken to mean what is ultimately true in the final interpretation of everything – especially in the interpretation of *Ātmán* – i.e., the Transcendental aspect of *Brā́hman*. This is the concept of *Brā́hman* as the ultimate Transcendental (not Transcendent) Ground implied in all beings: as To Be. In fact, the Transcendental Ground should not be the same as the Transcendent Divine, which is possibly the final Entity in Process – the ultimate end especially of *Ātmán* – by reason of which all beings are in process. This sort of the concept of *Brā́hman* should have been as the Transcendental-Transcendent, i.e., as the Transcendent in whom the Transcendental is realized in Consciousness / Conscious Process. But, the concept of *Brā́hman* as the Ultimate Transcendental Ground is contrary to such an understanding.

(2) At other times, the ultimate *Brā́hman* is taken only as the Transcendent Divine mentioned above. The Divine, in fact, should not be the *māyic* universe, or should not include it. Hence, the Divine, as distinct from the universe, is taken as the *Brā́hman*, and is properly termed *Īśvara*, which need not necessarily be unchanging. As an Entity, but the highest at that, *Īśvara* is infinitely personal. This concept is close to the concept of the personal God in Rāmānuja and others. This is not the Transcendental Ground, but a sort of Transcendent Ground for the process of the universe, because it does not include the universe. This is contrary to the rendering of the concept of *Brā́hman* as the ultimate Transcendental Ground, To Be.

(3) The Ultimate Entity to which everything belongs and into which everything returns is the whole of Reality. But, in Vedāntic Metaphysics, *Bráhman* is that ultimate into which everything returns. That is, it is the most inclusive Transcendent Entity, which includes both the universe and the Divine. In short, this view presents the Vedāntic concept of *Bráhman* as that of the totality of whatever is. Properly speaking, this ultimate Entity, Reality-in-total, should have been seen as the Transcendent Ground of both the Universe and the Divine – the Ground in which To Be is infinitely consciously realized, and only partially Transcendentally (ontologically) realized (because To Be is purely Transcendentally realized only in Reality-in-total). But, according to the third view presented here, *Bráhman* is considered to be Reality-in-total. This is contrary to the concepts of To Be, Reality-in-total, and Reality-in-general.

Thus, these three fallacious positions have caused much confusion concerning the concept of *Bráhman*. We shall, therefore, analyse the epistemological reasons behind them.

4.1.2. Connexion between the *Bráhman-Ātmán* Confusion and the Double Truth

It should also be kept in mind that the confusion regarding the concept of *Bráhman* is the direct theoretical fallout of non-recognition of the continuity between *pāramārthika* and *vyāvahārika jñāna*s. If the two *jñāna*s were absolutely different, the kernel of the *Ātmán*, which is actually proceeding from *vyāvahārika jñāna*, can never be led to the allegedly absolute *pāramārthika jñāna* by any agency.

Moreover, if the common expression, "In the *turīya*, I reach the state of mind in which I don't perceive myself as having or being *Ātmán*, nor as being a soul, but merely become *Bráhman*" were true, then the concept of *Bráhman* is that of a purely idealized thing, namely, Being-as-such, taken to be an unchanging Thing! Then, there cannot be a temporal experience standing in lieu of what is called the transition point. But, it is a fact that the *mumukṣu* still lives, and even thinks in space and time. This shows that there is continuity between the two poles, namely, *Ātmán* and *Bráhman*, and so, the absolutisation of this epistemological transition is the reason behind the absolutisation of the experience of identity between *Bráhman* and *Ātmán*. The alleged experience of Being here is, therefore, a conceptual-ideal experience through the semantic act of 'naming' of the content of the experience as identity! Hence, there is parallelism between this epistemology and the ontology of the *Bráhman-Ātmán* paradigm, and this semantics and epistemology are the sources of the ontological muddle.

4.1.3. What Needs to Be Done?

We do not find in Vedāntic Metaphysics much logical application of the mystical realization of the fact that terms are extremely relativised agents of linguistically fixating the partially fluent aspect of actuality. Let alone the case of ordinary philosophical terms, but not even regarding foundational philosophical and mystical terms has any orthodox system made the effort to relativize the linguistically meaning-fixing and fixating terms, which, otherwise, stand for the fluent aspect of actuality, and still safeguard the reality of beings as partially fluent and partially static processes! This has caused semantic muddle in all the fundamental conclusions of the Vedāntic philosophies.[16] This confusion in the concept of *Bráhman* (and other concepts like *Ātmán*, world, *Māyā*, entities, etc.), which we find in the *Upaniṣads*, Vedantic philosophies and other Hindu systems, has to be bridged in order to bring about an effective integration of metaphysical thinking in Hindu philosophy. The manner of such a reconstruction and its anticipated results may be treated in a cursory and perfunctory manner here.

4.2. First Characteristic of the Reconstruction: Pluriversality by *Bráhman-Ātmán* and *Pāramārthika-Vyāvahārika* Continuity

4.2.1. What is Wrong with the *Bráhman-Ātmán* Paradigm?

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[16] Even contemporary Western and Indian semantics, logic, epistemology, and metaphysics have been getting logically muddled mainly due to lack of know-how as how to practically infuse the relative, probabilistic content of terms and words into discursive processes. Semantics needs to grow beyond the discovery of multi-valued logics, with the help of probabilistic epistemologies and ontologies, so as to make this much-awaited effect felt. I believe this can be had when postmodern, process, and scientific epistemologies and ontologies meet seriously with contributions of logicians like Lukasiewicz (many-valued logics) and Gödel (incompleteness theorem), on the one hand, and with contemporary scientific ontologies, on the other, that interpret the scientific realism involved in the origins of quantum mechanics. Ordinary language may not be able to circumvent two-valued logic, but the effects of multi-valued logic may be brought about by ontology and its systemic logic that probabilise logical procedures and results. This is indicated even in mystical experience of a variety that tends not to absolutize, and ontology should join hands with such a mysticism.

The major debility of the solution put forth in the *Bráhman-Ātmán* paradigm – the supposed actuality of the idealized *Ātmán*-into-*Bráhman* movement – is without the possibility of a contrariwise relation, i.e., the relation *Bráhman*-into-*Ātmán*. There is no mutuality in the whole. So, the *Bráhman-Ātmán* paradigm is clearly one-sided. That is, *Bráhman* has no realized ideal identity-relation with *Ātmán*. So, there is no way of *Ātmán*'s being affected by *Bráhman* for a haul towards It. But, as we have seen, *Ātmán*'s relationship with *Bráhman* is such that the whole process is purely the result of the individual *jīvātmán*'s bringing oneself to awareness or the result of the Eternal Veda's being communicated to the individual through other individuals. This insulates *Bráhman* from pluriversal relationship from the part of *Ātmán*. This does also contradict the dictum, *Īśāvāsyam idam sarvam yat kiñca jagatyām jagat* (Īśa Up. 2.1), which seems to be more in keeping with the *Viśiṣṭādvaita* and other *Bhakti* traditions, but never in unison with the idealizing identity-relation *Ātmán*-into-*Bráhman*, or vice versa.

4.2.2. What is Wrong with the *Pāramārthika-Vyāvahārika Jñānas*?

We have already said that if we can establish that even *pāramārthika* is not absolute, then we know also that *turīya* is not absolute. This may be accomplished in the following manner. On the basis of the continuity between *Bráhman* and *Ātmán* it may be said that *pāramārthika* is an idealization of an infinitely impossible state of wisdom, and so, even in *turīya* we do not have an absolute knowledge. Since *Bráhman* is the infinitely actively Transcendental (conscious, contemplative) Transcendent Entity, It is only partially and ever finitely approachable by *Ātmán*s that are in *vyāvahārika* knowledge.

However great is the miracle that carries the one in *turīya* up unto *pāramārthika*, it requires infinity, and the whole ontological status of *Bráhman* will have to be bestowed on *Ātmán* for one to achieve the *pāramārthika* level of *jñāna*. Hence, we human *Ātmán*s can have only ever closer acceleration and ontological (and conscious) approximation to *pāramārthika jñāna*. That is, the process of attainment of liberation is only a being accelerated unto *pāramārthika jñāna* with the least possibility to any deceleration that might annul the acceleration into zero. The probabilistic zigzag in acceleration could be the effect of *vyāvahārika jñāna*. That is, there is always a measure of the *pāramārthika* in the *vyāvahārika*, in which dwells the *Ātmán*. There is no absolute *vyāvahārika* for *Ātmán* to dwell in, for it is already partially occupied by *pāramārthika jñāna*. This shows that both the types of knowledge are mutually continuous. The Vedas and the Vedāntas never recognized this possibility; nor did they possess a semantics and logic that can put such recognition into discourse. They knew only to make pure deductions and inductions, or, even when the inference is realized to be a mixture of both induction and deduction, they preferred to call it by either of the names.

4.2.3. Semantic and Logical Aspect of the Reconstruction

The whole logical method behind derivation of the meanings of the concepts of *Bráhman* and *Ātmán* and the twofold *jñāna*s should, therefore, be questioned. This would allow us to suggest a sufficiently radical overhaul and renovation of the procedure in creating a metaphysical understanding of Reality-in-total under the point of view of the relativistic and probabilistic, Transcendental and Transcendent categorial system. The actual nature of logical thought is never purely deductive, nor purely inductive. I would call it, instead, the inductive-deductive method. Induction and deduction are to be integrated in such a way that the concepts of the Transcendental and the Transcendent are properly discovered and clarified in the context of the paradigm. So, we can never accept inferring first an absolute and unchanging thing called *Bráhman* and then *Ātmán*'s actually impossible and conceptually unnatural mystical leap into the allegedly absolute *Bráhman*. This will be both empirically and ontologically impossible if we admit a possibility of there being an absolute state.

Hence, the absolute state called *Bráhman* as the very To Be, an inactive state (inactive because To Be is not a thing, but an ontological concept) which is the condition for the possibility of there being anything at all, is an impossibility. Else, we would have an actual, infinite fact in this empirical impossibility. The logical conclusion that one has attained the state of identity with the absolute, and the semantic nature of the conceptual objects involved in it, are not to be equated with actuality. Such equation is the semantic and logical mistake in Vedāntic Metaphysics. Inductively deductive thought would yield that the actuality of the specific is not equivalent to the actuality of the experience and the thought. Just as this thought yields only truth probability, so also, the result of the specific *Ātmán*'s experience effects only a partial difference and partial identity in the *Ātmán* with the no-more-absolutely-inactive *Bráhman*.

4.2.4. Nature of Immortality Inducted from Nature of *Pāramārthika Jñāna*

The nature of *pāramārthika jñāna*, too, is, therefore, no more an absolute state. It is the epistemologically ever-bettering state of approach to conscious immersion in *Bráhman*. This would hold the key to understanding the nature of immortality. Since *pāramārthika jñāna* is always induced, first of all, by contact with others (who communicate the Veda to individuals) and the consequent experiential communication of the Word, and secondly, by means of moral action and contemplation, individual immortality is simultaneously also a community affair. Now, how is immortality to be understood? No one communicates the 'infinite' *pāramārthika jñāna* infinitely, nor attains it infinitely, for otherwise one would already have been *Bráhman*. Instead, perhaps there always is continuous asymptotical approach to *Bráhman* and *pāramārthika jñāna*. This continuous ontic approach is itself a state, and let us call it the beginning of *mokṣa*. Hence, immortality may now be interpreted only in this manner, since *Bráhman* and *pāramārthika jñāna* are no more absolute states.

4.2.5. Pluriversality in *Bráhman-Ātmán* Thinking

As a result of the reconstructive integration (by mutual continuity) of *Bráhman* and *Ātmán*, the *pāramārthika-vyāvahārika jñāna*s and the simultaneously deductive and inductive ways of logic, we have an ontology with the greatest possible range, by partial identity and partial difference between entities, both God and entities in the world. This is what we aim at in the name of pluriversality in Bráhman-Ātmán *Thinking*. This allows not merely humans to be imbued with the Divine. The whole universe is imbued with the Divine. The difference between entities and humans rests in that humans approach *Bráhman* consciously, through thinking, loving, and acting at the realm of the awareness of To Be. As we have already seen, *Bráhman* could no more be conceived as a wholly other, but as the Entity that thinks, loves, and acts in favour of Himself, the world and humans at the level of the To Be of Reality-in-total.

To all individual *Ātmán*s instrumental in communicating Wisdom (Veda, which is the Word) to other *Ātmán*s should be posed the question, How has true knowledge been aroused in them? This involves an infinite regress. This is supposed to end up in *Bráhman* as the cause of it, but

Bráhman is absolutely unchanging for all the *Vedāntins*, and so, does not initiate anything specific and does not contain anything! This is a paradox. Any paradox has to be solved not from within the system, but from its very roots. All possible presuppositions of the system – especially the concepts of the allegedly absolute *Bráhman*-to-*Ātmán* identity, the uncaused *Ātmán*-into-*Bráhman* process and the absolute jump from the *vyāvahārika* into the *pāramārthika jñāna* in Vedāntic systems – are to be questioned. If *Bráhman* is no more absolute in the sense of To Be, It is only the highest conscious realization of the ontological foundation To Be of Reality-in-total. This allows *Bráhman* to be active in favour of *Ātmán*s and the world! This is the basis of genuine pluriversality in ontology.

A set of concepts, available even in ontological synthesis, would work as the almost absolutely necessary categories for integration. We have them in categorial concepts formulated so as to effect a Transcendental and Transcendent clarity in all the presuppositions of the fundamental ontological and epistemological concepts involved. First of all, as we saw, this sort of an understanding allows for great ontological pluriversality in the context of the vertical *Bráhman-Ātmán* relationship. This is vertical, downward into *Ātmán*, and secondly also upward, from the latter into *Bráhman*. Secondly, it is also horizontal, because *Ātmán* has its ontological principle of continuity in partial identity to and partial difference from other such *Ātmán*s. For this reason, any entity is an instrument of acceleration of *Ātmán* into the mystic-epistemological *pāramārthika* process and the ontological *Bráhman* process. This is possible because there is epistemological continuity between *pāramārthika-vyāvahārika jñāna*s and ontological continuity between *Bráhman* and *Ātmán*. This is most similar to the contemporary Process philosophical and also Christian philosophical understanding of God, World, and Man, wherein God is infinitely active, loving, and aware.

This has allowed a clear and adequate understanding of the genuinely horizontal aspect of human existence. Its ramifications in religious, social, moral, cultural, organizational, literary, and aesthetical fields of action and expression remain to be elaborated. However, it suffices to assert that this model is capable of creating pluriversality into a reality in the philosophies and sciences of religion, society, morality, culture, organization, literature, and aesthetical experience.

Another important problem that has vexed the whole history of Eastern and Western thought, and seems to possess a systematic answer here, is the *problem of the constitution of the relation between the Divine and the entities in the world, especially humans*. That is, *Bráhman* is no more to be taken as a vacuous but infinitely actual entity. If *Bráhman* is not vacuous, He is infinitely conscious, infinitely active, hence infinitely changing, and, thus, also infinitely loving. Thus, we have a concept of a *Bráhman*, who is capable of getting in infinite specific relations, and simultaneously capable of being entered into a relation by conscious beings by their acting, loving, and thinking at the level of the To Be of Reality-in-total.

The Divine in this process is an actual Divine. In that case, *Bráhman* should pervade all, but be distinct from entities. The manner / way of this mutuality – of this awareness, consciousness and love, in short, this infinite change – is naturally the To Be of Reality-in-total. This *Bráhman* is not the Transcendental To Be, not is it Reality-in-total, but the Transcendental-Transcendent, because the Transcendental is had in *Bráhman* at the level of Its infinitely active consciousness! Such a *Bráhman* alone is capable of being *Saccidā́nandam* – the concrete basis of pluriversality in Reality-in-total.

4.2.6. Theoretical Basis of a New Vedāntic Ontological System

Hereafter, the distinction involved in *Bráhman-Ātmán* mutuality need not be mutually exclusive (meaning, absolute distinction), mutually inclusive (meaning, identity), or unilaterally inclusive (meaning, one totally subsuming the other). If there is unilateral inclusion, *Bráhman* not only pervades, but also includes entities. In this case it is *mere inclusion, wherewith Bráhman alone exists*, and entities are only limbs. This is nothing but Rāmānuja's Qualified Non-dualism in which *Ī́śvara*, human soul, and the world form an organic, dependent whole. But, one fact that should be known clearly is this: even in Rāmānuja God does not depend on man or the world to any extent. That is, there is only a unilateral relationship: that from man and the conscious world towards God, insofar as the theoretical foundation of God is *Bráhman*.

If *Bráhman* were the whole and *Ātmán*s were parts, then we may also think of the theoretically immediate possibility of a distinction of a double nature in all entities: (1) the primordial and consequent natures[17] of

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[17] The concept of God as endowed with primordial and consequent natures is not new in Western philosophy. Alfred North Whitehead has made a strong case for it

Bráhman and (2) the partially primordial and partially consequent natures of *Ātmán* and other entities. Although the part does not have the highest potentialities of the Whole, and *will never have them*, still, in Rāmānuja the *Ātmán* would have to be eternal, and, therefore, also infinite. If *Ātmán* were primordial and consequent, then, the same problem as in Śaṅkara (i.e., the question of equiprimordiality of *Ātmán*) continues to exist, and we will have to overcome the absolute distinction or identity that this state of affairs allows us to infer! Hence, we will have to be satisfied with *Bráhman* who is both primordial and consequent, and *Ātmán* that is only consequent. This implies a state of affairs in which *Ātmán* is the result of productivity of the consequent nature of *Bráhman*, *Ātmán* contributes to the consequent nature of *Bráhman* by being ever closer to it, and *Ātmán* is incapable of ever fully being identical with *Bráhman* in Its primordial nature or even in Its consequent nature. *Ātmán*, then, has only one way out to attain *mokṣa*: to continuously evolve unto *Bráhman*, never becoming the 'That' of "That thou art." Therefore, *mokṣa* is no more a final state, but a continuous growth in attaining the qualities of *Bráhman*.

We have two conclusions metaphysically and cosmologically explosive of Vedāntic Metaphysics: that *Bráhman* is infinitely primordial and consequent, and *Ātmán* is exclusively finitely consequent. This would ward off any possibility of monism and pantheism. If we favour monism, the possibilities of differentiation between *Ātmán* and *Bráhman*, and between *Ātmán* and beings, will be out of the question. If we favour pantheism, (1) the above-said possibility of difference would naturally be a block, (2) the question of *Bráhman-Ātmán* identity will be meaningless, and (3) *Ātmán* being part of *Bráhman* would also be pointless.

We would have to create an ontological system in which there arises matter and relatively individualized spirit (both with consequent nature), from within the primordial-consequent matrix of Reality-in-total, that ever proceeds to grow upwards into the ever higher realms of the consequent nature, though never reaching the heights of the infinitely primordial and consequent natures of the Divine. The only viable solution (i.e., continuous creation) will, then, have to be answered by positing nothing other than

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mainly in his *Process and Reality*, especially in pages 343-51. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology, Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of Edinburgh During the Session 1927-28*, Corrected Edition, David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, eds., New York: The Free Press, 1978.

continuous creation out of nothing, since, in the case of creation out of the Divine Himself, we would have to face the question of the absence of the infinite primordial nature in the creature created thus!

4.3. Second Characteristic of the Reconstruction: Pluriversality in Wise Ethical Action and Contemplation

4.3.1. Wisdom of Positing Simultaneity of Contemplation and Duties

The *āśramas* are a graded journey in perfection of the *Ātmán*-into-*Bráhman* movement. It is interesting to note that the *Upaniṣads* have stressed the need for the renouncer to mix performance of duties throughout the contemplative journey. For example, *Chāṇdogya Upaniṣad* prescribes duties for the *āśramas* and calls it *trayo dharmaskandhāḥ* (Ch. Up. 2.23.1).[18] Similarly, contemplation does not start merely in *sannyāsa*. It is already present in the very stages of *brahmacarya*, *gārhastya*, and *vānaprastha*, and culminates in *sannyāsa*. But, the ways in which these are to be mixed lacks one important preconditional component, without which genuine *pāramārthika jñāna* would be continuously stifled and *vyāvahārika jñāna* alone would reign. This lacuna may be conceived and solved in the following manner.

Pāramārthika is the ultimate knowledge. In actual practice, as we have seen, this is never the ultimate in the full sense of the term 'absolute'. Even as, in the earlier *āśramas*, one is told to practise one's duties wholeheartedly and perform worship of *Bráhman* as *Īśvara* or any of the *Saguṇa*-Trinity, namely, *Brahma*, *Viṣṇu*, or *Śiva*, efforts should have been on from the part of the renouncer (*sannyāsi*) to give to the *brahmacāri*, *gṛhastha* and *vānaprastha* foretastes of the ideal contemplative experience proper to *sannyāsa*. This must have been taking place automatically within the context of the worshipful and active experiences of these earlier *āśramas*; the epistemological and ontological foundation for it is, however, absent in that the experience in the *turīya* state of contemplation is considered to be absolute and proper only to the final state, though it is not the case in actuality. In short, we should theoretically and consciously allow the *turīya* state to happen in the earlier *āśrama*s.

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[18] "The same *Upaniṣad*-text speaks of men in the three earlier stages of Student, Householder and Hermit as going to 'pure regions' and of the remaining one, 'Renouncer' as becoming immortal. The reason given for this is that the Renouncer incurs no sin by renouncing Action, while people in the other three stages incur great sin by neglecting the duties laid down in scripture." Ganganath Jha, *Sankara Vedanta*, Darbhanga Lectures Series 1, Darbhanga: Darbhanga University Press, 1940, 54.

Insofar as the possibility of simultaneity of the effort for and the foretaste of both the highest contemplation and the most virtuous performance of duties is not recognized, there is something amiss in their possible realization. This is theoretically made impossible in the existing Vedāntic theory, since *turīya*, the height of 'identity' experience in *sannyāsa*, is absolute, and resists foretastes. This has to be done away with, since the contemplative experience had in earlier *āśrama*s is similar – although not equal – to the non-absolute experience in the *turīya*. The state of affairs in which we absolutize *turīya* is the result of the absolutisation of *Bráhman* and *pāramārthika jñāna*.

Since we have already relativised them by use of the paradoxes that the concepts of *Bráhman-Ātmán* and *pāramārthika-vyāvahārika* incur, we may safely conclude that it is possible to have foretastes of the highest in morality and contemplation in any and every stage of spiritual development. This facilitates realization of the fact that although the distances from *Bráhman* to *Ātmán* and *pāramārthika* to *vyāvahārika* are supposedly infinite and absolute, they are still bridgeable in experience because the firsts of both the pairs are absolutisations of actuals that render their distances to the seconds infinite but non-absolute. That is, the concept of *Bráhman* hereunto has been a Transcendental absolutisation of the Transcendental-Transcendent, which is, in fact, not a pure, absolute being. *Pāramārthika* is a Transcendental absolutisation of the never-fully-to-occur in experience, due to the partial identity and partial difference between *Bráhman* and *Ātmán*. Even in (the renewed concept of) *Bráhman*, *pāramārthika jñāna* is infinite, but not absolute.

Pāramārthika is not the To Be, and instead the derivative, but ideal, generality of experience of the To Be of Reality-in-total in everything, in thinking, and especially in the mystical *turīya*. Let us call it Reality-in-general, the generalized but possible 'Transcendently' Transcendental category of all thought. This category is actual only in *Bráhman*. Its ideality is not as absolute as in the Vedāntic concept of *pāramārthika*. In *Bráhman* this is expressed not merely as the highest, infinite contemplation, but also as infinite activity – call it creation, love, providence, etc. This is the highest Wisdom, and human wisdom is a finite rendering of it with an ever-higher approach to the infinite (but not absolute [like in the pure, wholly other Being]) Wisdom of *Bráhman*.

4.3.2. Result: Ethical Action from Pluriversality in *Ātmán*-into-*Bráhman* Process

If there is the possibility of the *Ātmán*-into-*Bráhman* process, then 'process' should also be the nature of *Bráhman*. In that case, *Ātmán*, which is the processual self, can get ever closer to *Bráhman*, the processual Divine. But, *Bráhman*, as the Divine, should then be the Transcendental-Transcendent, i.e., Transcendentally, infinitely and eternally conscious and active Transcendent. The Divine is not to be taken merely as the Transcendent, because in that case, either it will be equal to the whole of Reality, or it will be a pure, unchanging, timeless, simple, non-spatial, and in short, vacuous entity incapable of relationship.

The moment we allow non-vacuous but infinite and eternal actuality to *Bráhman*, It can be conceived to be something similar in nature to, but infinitely higher than, human *Ātmán*. Although the process of absolute attainment to *Bráhman*-hood is impossible (even as one entity never becomes another), the process of conscious *Ātmán*-level universalization becomes an active affair, just as *Bráhman*, by nature, is infinitely consciously active. But this process takes place at the level of the To Be of Reality-in-total. *Bráhman* is not active merely finitely, but infinitely, at every finite space-time, and hence also finitely by exemplification of the infinite activity. The verisimilitude of this process becomes, thus, the activity leading human *Ātmán* to *Bráhman*-hood. *It includes all sorts of more and more all-inclusive activities in human life*, of which *the basis* is love of *Bráhman* and love of *Ātmán*s in the broad sense. *This, naturally, is the essence of both contemplation and action.* In this process, all *entities have their own place*. The metaphysics of it is, *therefore, genuinely pluriversal*: many against all. *The ontological foundation of ethical action is, therefore, not merely Bráhman, but the mutuality of Bráhman and Ātmán.*

Ethical action as such has not so far been made pluriversal after the manner of what we have done for theory, contemplation, and action, so that effort could be made to give this foretaste to humans belonging to all the *āśrama*s, castes, and countries. This lack in the Vedāntas, I hold, is resulting from the lack of recognition of the actual continuity between the *āśrama*s. Practical action for realizing the theoretically feasible realization of the *Bráhman-Ātmán* relationship and continuity holds the answer to the ills of society.

5. Conclusion

We have considered here qualitative concepts as transcendentals, all entities as transcendents, humans as transcendental-transcendents, the Divine as the Transcendental-Transcendent and Reality-in-total as the Transcendent. This, in the final analysis, is what has facilitated the proposed reconstruction in Vedāntic Metaphysics. The project remains to be worked out elaborately, but is presented herein in an elementary fashion.

We have not considered alternative cosmological concepts of *Bráhman*, like those of *Īśvara*, *Puruṣa*, etc., which are, from the Vedāntic perspective, generally meant for *vyāvahārika* consumption. Their conceptual coordination with the concepts of *Bráhman* and *Ātmán* and the process of *Ātmán* into *Bráhman*-hood is, therefore, not effected. It suffices here to say that even in the rush to elaborate on all these *ad hoc* concepts, the question of the nature of the alleged absoluteness of *Bráhman* has not sufficiently been dwelt upon, and so, has been left almost untouched as established from the viewpoint of conceptual feasibility. As *ad hoc*, these concepts have remained popular or pragmatic elaborations for adequations of the *Bráhman-Ātmán* paradigm, without actually explaining the dichotomies involved. Hence, these concepts are merely subsidiary to the paradigm as far as the Vedānta Metaphysics is concerned. This allows us not to be premature in this theoretical context in elaborating on the possible reconstruction of these concepts without incurring much incompleteness to the nature of this essay.

There has not been much *deconstruction* of Vedāntic Metaphysics in this essay because it has not proposed merely to posit the question of "Why not?" with the exclusive aim of unearthing the hidden psychological, sociological, and cultural-religious elements as the off-centre facts behind Vedāntic Metaphysics. Instead, it has attempted to posit the question of "Why?" and work with the possible effects of posing the epistemological, ontological, and theological question of "Why not?" Thus, this essay has remained a plea for reconstruction of Vedāntic Metaphysics along some contemporary epistemological, ontological, and theological lines, but with an independent stance.

Journal of Dharma 30, 3 (July-September 2005), 365-376

BOOK REVIEWS

Kuncheria Pathil, ***Trends in Indian Theology***, Bangalore: ATC Publications, 2005, pages 177, ISBN: 81-7086-364-3.

Kuncheria Pathil, the author of this book, is a well-known Indian theologian who knows the subject he deals with. *Trends in Indian Theology* is a very relevant and masterly work with a critical approach to theological developments in India, its various trends, agenda, and articulations. "Every new generation has to struggle and give an account of their faith in their own times, in response to their contexts and new challenges" (10). This is exactly what he has done through this book spread through six chapters. The first chapter is "An Indian Theology: A Historical Survey" which runs up to 50 pages. Divided in three parts (i. in the context of cultural, philosophical, and religious realities; ii. of socio-economic and political realities; and iii. of contemporary scenario of pluralism and convergence), this survey does a very praiseworthy work giving us a brief but very reliable account of theologizing in India. The author does justice to one of his own passing statements written down in this survey: "India's rich religious experience, our time-old tradition of harmony among the plurality of religion, the nation's resolve to construct a new society based on equal justice and freedom for all, and our strong commitment to eliminate poverty and misery, and solidarity with the poor and the marginalized, all these were seen as constituent parts of the 'new humanity' given in Jesus Christ" (42). Accordingly, this survey briefly comments on our time-old religious pluralism, philosophical heritage, beginnings of Indian Christian theology, Christian ashram movement, emergence of socio-economic consciousness, Indian theology of liberation, voice of the women theologians, and the dalit theology, etc. The survey concludes with a sad, yet hopeful, tone that our attempt to carve out various dimensions of Indian theology is not in its brightest sunshine due to several ecclesial or institutional limitations in the centres of theological formation; it is hopeful because of the emergence of new faculties of theology in India, new consciousness of human dignity and equality to all as a priority in all Christian agenda (60-61).

If we have a new consciousness, about which we are happy, and if we sincerely think that this will bring happiness to others, we will spontaneously share this to others, that "our joy may be complete" (1 Jn. 1: 4). This is true with regard to the church. Hence, "the Church is missionary by its very nature" (63). In the second chapter, Pathil deals with our missionary call, along with its relevance and obligation, to see "the seeds of the Word lie hidden in the cultural and religious traditions of the people" (72; AG no. 11). The author quotes several papal documents on mission and proclamation and clarifies the mission's central role and its various paths, such as, witnessing, proclamation, dialogue, liberation, etc. "Evangelization or the mission of the church is one, namely, partnership in the realization of God's plan of salvation in history and beyond it. This one mission as well as its goal is reached through different paths" (78; *Redemtoris Missio*, nos. 41-60). Dealing with the priorities of the paths of mission in India, the author writes:

> In the actual context of religious pluralism and the immense human misery and utter poverty, the primary path of the church's mission in India seems to be to enter into dialogue with all the major religions of the country in creating a just and better society based on the vision of Jesus and on the authentic human/Gospel/kingdom values. In such a context the proclamation of Jesus shall not be seen as something totally different from the kingdom values (87).

As I have mentioned in the beginning of this paragraph, real proclamation is the joyous sharing of one's transformed consciousness in Christ to others, consciousness of Jesus whom one has touched, experienced, and who has filled the heart with joy and will fill others' hearts also in the same way. Thus seen, the kingdom of God on earth is the shaping of a visible face of God on earth, first and foremost through the visible face of Jesus Christ, which is the "image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15; *Redemtoris Missio*, no. 18) and through every human person who participates in the fullness of this grace. Naturally, you enter into anything which this consciousness demands, suffering, sacrifice, service, and even death.

The religious pluralism was touched upon in the Chapter 2 in connection with proclamation. The third chapter is exclusively devoted for that. The author traces three stages in the Christian approach to other faiths in which they are looked upon from different perspectives. They are: (i) "merely man-made, magic-dominated manipulation of the divine" (91), (ii) "they are accepted as containing truths and human values" and, hence, disserving a positive consideration, and (iii) they are "accepted as 'ways of salvation' to their believers" (92). Even a great saint like Francis Xavier was not free of the negative impression the missionaries maintained in the first stage. "When the great missionary Francis Xavier wrote, 'the true God cannot dwell among heathen or hear their prayers … the idols of the heathen are of the devil and they must be destroyed at the first opportunity', he was only echoing the attitude and thinking of the church of his times" (91). Today's church has made great progress in its understanding of other religions. In this historical review, Pathil gives us certain glimpses of the biblical, the ancient, and medieval Catholic writers' views on other religions. The Protestants' formula *sola fide, sola gratia* and *sola scripturas*, as well as the well-known dictum "outside the church there is no salvation," are also discussed. Coming to the modern period, the schools of Theo-centrism and Christo-centrism are treated very briefly. In conclusion he says: "It is the task of Christian theology to continuously struggle to relate the revelation in Christ with revelation elsewhere in other religions, peoples and their cultures… All religions have to make a common pilgrimage and be committed to an open process of dialogue and collaboration for a better humanity and for the fullness of truth" (115-116).

In the fourth chapter, "Theology of the Kingdom and Christian Identity" is proposed for discussion. Three points are presented: (i) Theology of the Kingdom of God, (ii) Relation between the Kingdom and the Church, and (iii) Question of Christian Identity. The theology of the kingdom is developed from the use of the word 'kingdom' in the Old and New Testaments and Jesus' subtle correctives to the nationalistic and political over-tones given to the concept of the kingdom (122). "Kingdom of God is a present reality... However, kingdom of God transcends the present world and is also a future reality" (124). According to the dynamics of the kingdom, the present should always be judged and transcended by what was revealed in the past in Jesus and what we hope to come in future. It is in constant struggle for realizing God's will upon the earth that we could realize them. As an earthly reality, it is deeply related to the church and as our church is made of human individuals, finally, it is a question of our own Christian identity, which is well defined by the Council of Jerusalem as "'faith in Christ' and the presence of and 'obedience to the Holy Spirit'" (131; Acts 15). We need all other things discussed in the chapter, though most of them are subject to change.

Things that are subject to change are important, as far as the living church is concerned. Hence, Pathil treats the question of inculturation as something that should happen as the kingdom of God takes shape in any land. Fifth chapter is mainly a review of the historical process of inculturation down through the centuries, namely, from the period of intense inculturation (1-800 AD), the period of centralization (800-1600 AD), the period of cultural colonialism (1600-1900 AD), and the period of re-discovery (1900 AD onwards). In his concluding remarks on this chapter he rightly says: "inculturation happens spontaneously and naturally when a Christian community lives its faith in its own cultural settings in an open and dynamic relationship. Inculturation cannot be fabricated by some experts in some isolated liturgical centres or libraries. It is by and large the work of the entire Christian community, of course, members having different roles in the process" (153).

The final chapter is a "Re-thinking on Theological Education in India." This chapter begins with a discussion with the late theologian Sebastian Kappan whose writings have shed much light on some of the irrelevant aspects of our contemporary theological education and the need of re-thinking the same today. Three models are proposed for this purpose: (i) Socio-economic Contexts, (ii) Religio-cultural Contexts, and (iii) Ecumenical Contexts of India. In the third section, the sad story of divisions within the church is very concisely, yet touchingly, presented. Thus, the ecumenical context is vividly explained (167-174).

As I went on reading Pathil's work, one thought that continuously came to me is the struggle of the church to be faithful to its faith in Christ. Though individual errors and even misuse of power are possible in the church, there is a very painful, ongoing, communitarian search in the church to read what God has revealed to us in and through Jesus Christ. This search, humble yet determined, always seeks the assistance of the Holy Spirit which is promised to the church by the Lord. Once it is discerned, the church states it boldly, whether it is to the Patriarch of Constantinople, the centre of the eastern empire of Rome (168), or to a simple Jew who baptized himself. "Pope Innocent III (1206) instructed that his baptism is invalid. But he added that the rite or sacrament of baptism was not necessary for salvation. 'Man is saved not by the rite of baptism, but by the faith of which baptism is only a visible sign'" (110).

I look with delight at the brevity and clarity in Pathil's presentation. As regards the theological formation in India, I fully agree with him that there is something very seriously wrong in our present formation programme and I do encourage the very relevant suggestions made at the end of some chapters. Moreover, I feel that something is seriously missing which is not properly addressed to in our contemporary theological discussions. This is the reality of a priest's or seminarian's personal relationship with Jesus Christ, his deep faith, intimacy with Christ, and absolute trust in and surrender to him. For this purpose priests and seminarians should have time to be with Jesus. Jesus said: "I have called you to be with me" (Mk. 3:13). It seems that in our heavy schedule of programmes, seminarians as well as priests in ministry do not have sufficient time to be alone with Jesus. Study on Jesus Christ, whether to make an Indian theology based on classical Indian works or to articulate liberation theology in answer to our social context, is only one of the paths we choose to realize Jesus in us. The cardinal point is that the priest or seminarian be one with Jesus in mind, heart, values, and life-style. This means a total transformation to the person of Jesus, and this cannot be replaced by Indian spiritual traditions or social contexts. This needs very deep faith, commitment, and a culture of meditation. Transformation takes place in the realm of faith, not in the realm of reason, though reason is very well used to explain and to expound. Only through faith we directly touch and experience God and this has a very personal and intimate dimension as well. Great saints of the church, like Francis of Assisi, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, or even the young Therese of Lisieux, some of whom are acclaimed to be the doctors of the church, invite us to a different experience. They have done great things in this world, the fruit of which we still enjoy and their books are some of the best sellers even in the contemporary spiritual world. Why most of our seminarians and perhaps also priests do not find sufficient time or interest in these kinds of writings or in any spirituality leading to mysticism. Can this be an ideal situation for India and its theologizing? This is only a question lingering in my mind and I earnestly think that our Indian Church is very poor in contemplative prayer and mystical traditions of the church. Pathil does make a couple of references to this, when he deals with the Ashram movement and the need of deeper faith. But faith, to be joyful and fecundative, should be deeply personal as Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane and in many other situations when he raised his heart spontaneously to his Father.

I very much appreciate what Pathil has said in and through this short but solid book. Pathil does not claim to have made any new discovery in this book. This is not the purpose. However, it opens our eyes and leads us through the real issues centring on or deeply pertaining to our theological issues in India. Each issue is treated first by a short and substantial appraisal of what has been done so far, and then by a smart and penetrative look into the present, all of which are well analysed, summarized, and documented, and are followed by insightful concluding remarks by way of suggestions or pointers for future discussion. The style of writing is lucid and clear and you do not need a second reading to follow his text. I find this a very good book, not occupying much space, but supplying us with a lot of information with regard to ecclesial and theological events in India, with accurate historical dates and ecclesiastical documents. I would recommend this as a book, handy enough, for immediate reference regarding many of our most relevant theological issues, much discussed in India today.

V. F. Vineeth

Raimon Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, trans. Alfred DiLascia, Faith Meets Faith Series, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004, pages xxi + 214, ISBN: 1-57075-564-7.

Christophany is the translation of the Italian original, *La pienezza dell'uomo: una cristofania* (Milan: Jaca Books, 1999). It is noteworthy that the English title of the book has reversed the order of the original. The book contains an interesting foreword by Francis D'Sa under the title: "Fullness of 'Man' or Fullness of 'the Human'?" (xi-xxi). Here he notes that the core of the book is on the mystical experience of Jesus in terms of advaitic thought. Panikkar tries to interpret three important utterances of Jesus, namely: "Abba, Father," "The Father and I are one," and "It is good that I leave." A basic assertion of the book is that incarnation is "*incarnatio continua.*"

The book is divided into three parts: The Christophanic Experience (part 1), The Mysticism of Jesus the Christ: The Experience of Jesus (part 2), and Christophany: The Christic Experience (part 3). The first two parts are divided into three chapters each, while the last part is divided into nine *Sūtras*. The book concludes with an epilogue (that employs poetic language and some hymns), a final word (quotes from Jn. 1:6 and St. Bonaventure), a detailed glossary, bibliography, and a general index.

Panikkar's point of departure lies in traditional Christology. We cannot, however, fully agree with his comment that "Christology has been developed only within the framework of the Western world" (7), for Christology was developed also within the framework of the *Eastern* world. He further observes: "despite its Trinitarian soul, Christology has not really freed itself from the monotheism it inherited from the Abrahamic tradition" (7). This reflects his mind that Christology should have really freed itself from the Abrahamic tradition. This calls for a critical response, for Christology has no need of being liberated from the monotheism of Abrahamic tradition.

We would like to point out that faith in the Trinity is not at all a denial or substitution of monotheism as religion, but its radicalization; for both are based on the religious experience of God's revelation (Rahner). The monotheism inherited from the Abrahamic tradition not only can very well go hand in hand with the faith in a Triune God, it also does. Jewish monotheism has been really open to a Trinitarian faith: Jesus himself stands in this tradition. We do not deny the fact that Jewish monotheism has militated against a Trinitarian vision of God. The heresies of Monarchianism and Unitarianism are examples of this. The fault is, however, not with the monotheism of the Abrahamic tradition as such, but in the way this has been understood.

The new concept in the book is Christophany; the author explains and develops it in comparison with and contrast to Christology. It takes nothing away from Christology but is open to the reality of the Spirit; it takes into account the world's other religious traditions, and is open to a dialogue with them; moreover, it is more experiential than Christology.

The book is all about the mysticism of Jesus Christ. This is elaborated with the help of three select *mahāvākyas* (great assertions or statements) from the Gospels, namely, "*Abba*, Father" (Mk. 14:36); "I and the Father are one" (Jn. 10:30), and "It is good that I leave" (Jn. 16:7). Regarding the first, Panikkar argues that Jesus is a natural son of God not solely through his divine nature but also through his human nature (94f.). This implies that we too are God's natural children, not merely children by adoption. Panikkar clarifies further that Jesus is the natural son of God in a metaphorical sense. Here we have a natural metaphor, while the talk of adoptive sonship employs a cultural metaphor.

In the last part, Panikkar formulates nine thought provoking and insightful *sūtras*. In explanation of the first *sūtra* (Christ is the Christian symbol for the whole of reality) Panikkar affirms that the whole of reality could be called "Father, Christ, Holy Spirit." In this connection he speaks of the following difference between incarnation and *avatāra*. According to him, "the homeomorphic equivalent of Christ, in a comparative study, is not that of an *avatāra*, a descent of the divine," for, "an *avatāra* is not a real being in the world of the *saṁsāra* but a true manifestation of the divine in docetic form… Krishna is not a man; he is a God, a manifestation of God in human form. Christ … is neither a member of the pantheon nor a realized, divinized individual; his divinization is not an accident. Christ is the very incarnation of God, his first-born" (146-7). The difference seems to lie in being a *real* being (incarnation) and taking an *apparent* form (*avatāra*). The difference seems to be, however, not crucial or essential, because the *avatāra* is recognized as "a manifestation of God in human form," "a true manifestation of the divine," so much so that "Krishna is a God."

It may be noted that when the author speaks of Christ he does not mean Jesus the Christ. We shall see below his ideas on the relationship between Jesus and the Christ.

Further, the following statement of the author presents certain difficulties: "Within a monotheistic theology, the incarnation … represents … a great difficulty. The Absolute cannot become man – nor can anything else. Within a Trinitarian vision, however, the centrality of Christ with respect to the whole of reality is a direct consequence of the incarnation" (147). As has already been pointed out above, we would like to maintain that monotheistic and Trinitarian theologies are not really contradictory, for monotheism is not the same as Unitarianism. Christian monotheism is neither monism nor monarchianism. In other words, Christian faith is monotheistic and Trinitarian; it is Trinitarian monotheism.

According to the second *sūtra*, "the Christian recognizes Christ *in* and *through* Jesus." Jesus of Nazareth is here the "revelation of Christ" (149). This implies that although Jesus is Christ, "Christ cannot be identified completely with Jesus of Nazareth" (150). For the author "Jesus is the symbol of Christ" (151). This leads us conclude that for Panikkar Christ is another word for the Logos or the Son. This seems to be corroborated by his description of the Trinity as Father, Christ, and Holy Spirit. The original meaning of Christ is here radically changed.

In the traditional understanding one could very well say that Jesus is the symbol of the Logos, for he is the incarnate Logos. At the same time, precisely because of the incarnation, the Logos himself is the very person of Jesus; Jesus and the Logos are, therefore, personally identical. We can, however, distinguish between Jesus, on the one hand, and the different stages and phases of the Logos and of Christ, on the other. In this special sense we agree with Panikkar that Christ cannot be identified completely with Jesus. The Christ of whom St. Paul speaks of in 1 Cor. 10:4, the glorified Christ, cosmic Christ, eschatological Christ, etc., are, of course, not completely identical with the earthly Jesus of Nazareth, although they are different forms of the *same* person. In an analogous way this holds true also of each human being with respect to the different stages of growth and development. What one is as an adult is different from what one was as a child; however, one is personally the same. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8).

The distinction between Christ and Jesus in the above sense does not mean any personal separation. To state that Christ cannot be fully identified with Jesus does not mean that there are others who are also Christ in the same way. In other words, we cannot hold that the Christ (or Logos) has many incarnations other than in Jesus of Nazareth. However, to speak of other possible and actual "manifestations" of the Christ (Logos) in the sense of Panikkar is a different matter.

The sixth *sūtra* runs as follows: "The protological, historical, and eschatological Christ is a unique and selfsame Reality, distended in time, extended in space, and intentional in us" (165). This contains valid insights on deeper meanings of religion, the world, and incarnation. The author expounds it interestingly. The seventh *sūtra* deals with incarnation as inculturation. In the ninth *sūtra* Panikkar comes back to his celebrated "cosmotheandric" or "theanthropocosmic" intuition and sees in Christ the "conjunction" and reconciliation between the divine, human, and the universe.

The book with its Christophany reads like a mystical poetical vision rather than a systematic treatise on Christology or Trinity. It contains, at the same time, many valid insights and novel ways of thinking combined with Panikkar's early reflections on Christ. It contains also a powerful appeal to social justice and solidarity. The meditations are at once Trinitarian and non-dualistic (advaitic). Certain passages contain, however, ambiguities and confusions. This does not minimize the value and originality of the work.

Sebastian Athappilly

Norman A. Hjelm ed., *Faith and Order: Towards a North American Conference* (Study Guide), Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005, pages x+50, ISBN: 0-8028-2914-7.

More than ever before, the Christian communities are becoming conscious of the urgent need of visible unity among the followers of Christ if they are to become effective witness to Him in the world. Due to the alarming speed of scientific and technological advancements, the world is shrinking into a global village, and in this context, the divisions among the followers of Christ are, indeed, scandalous stumbling blocks for the unity of hearts among the nations and cultures. The bold steps taken by *Faith and Order* to accelerate the process of unity among various Christian communities are a matter of hope, primarily to all the believers who are looking forward to visible unity, and to the world at large where unity and peace are often threatened by the divisive forces. The study guide *Faith and Order: Towards a North American Conference*, edited by Norman A. Hjelm, outlines the goal and purpose of the forthcoming encounter between members of different Christian traditions in a prayerful and reflective environment.

The introductory statement, signed by the members of the conference, belonging to various Christian traditions, presents the hopes and aspirations of this reunion, and explains clearly the theme selected for the conference: "The Church: Its Faith and Unity." Through the long years of its existence, the goal of the movement has gradually evolved from greater mutual understanding among the churches to the restoration of visible unity. The modern trends in ecumenism have enabled the Christians to listen to the call of the Lord to unity with greater urgency. The final prayer of the Lord can be a reality only when there is visible unity among the Churches, so that the world may believe the authenticity of our mission in the world.

The Planning consultations for the envisaged Conference brings to light the right mentality and approach every follower of Christ should have: while remaining faithful to one's own history and traditions, every Christian should be prepared for a repentant transformation, to respond to the Holy Spirit, the promoter of *koinonia* that we may feel hunger and thirst for full communion. The diversity of cultures in which the Word of God was preached, indeed, adds to the richness of Christian Heritage. At the same time, tragic divisions among Christians constitute a scandal to the world. Jeffery Gros, while presenting *Faith and Order* from a historical perspective, is hopeful that the envisaged conference will surely provide ample resource for the renewal of the church in unity, in its pilgrim journey. George Vandervelde, in his article on "Unity in Identity," clearly expresses the view that the unity engendered by the conference does not jeopardize the identity of the individual churches which is the fruit of the unique tradition and Christ Experience of a particular community; rather, it aims at an ongoing approximation to the true and full identity of the church as the church of Christ. Then, the church in the modern world will be capable of witnessing to Jesus Christ and his Gospel as it was handed over to us by the Apostles, argues Donna Geernaert.

As Norman A. Hjelm rightly points out, the purpose of this small book is to "foster awareness of the issues surrounding the Faith and Order Movement" and this booklet is meant "for use by laity and clergy in study groups, in congregations, seminaries and variety of ecumenical contexts." Indeed, this endeavour of the *Faith and Order* will be instrumental to quench the thirst for unity among the Christian communities and, thus, to become a true witness to Christ and His message in the world.

Wilson Edattukaran

Basudev Mishra, *Ritualistic Culture of Sri Jagannatha: As Revealed in Nīlādrimahōdaya*, Puri: Utkal Sanskrit Research Society, 2005, pages viii+140.

Ritualistic Culture of Sri Jagannātha is an outstanding study on the cult of Jagannātha as revealed in the purāṇic *smārta* text, *Nīlādrimahōdaya* (NM). The name, a combination of *Nīlādri* (blue mountain) and *mahōdaya* (advent [of the Lord]), has an auspicious significance, as the Lord of the blue mountain refers to Sri Jagannātha. The work begins by narrating the story of Lord Jagannātha and gives detailed description of the festivals and rituals associated with the Jagannātha worship. It gives a descriptive picture of the injunctions in respect of rituals of Sri Jagannātha observed daily, monthly, and yearly relating to various occasions.

Unlike many texts relating to the rituals of the Jagannātha temple the author has succeeded in shedding new light on the rituals and their origin relating to Sri Jagannātha in the present work. This work is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter skilfully brings out the salient features of the NM along with a critical introduction while the second chapter deals with the evolution of Lord Sri Jagannātha, pointing to the evolutionary nature of the cult of Jagannātha before the NM and the establishment of Sri Jagannātha in NM.

While analyzing the festivals and rituals in the third chapter of the book, Mishra claims that the rituals adopted in the Jagannātha are much prior to that of the festivals celebrated in other regions. He asserts that the rituals of Jagannātha are influenced by the *tantras* whereas the festivals are influenced by the purāṇic *smārta-dharma*. In the fourth chapter an attempt is made to ascertain the influence of historical incidents upon NM and, thus, to base the originality of NM in connection with Jagannātha cult.

The impact of NM on the traditions and customs of Orissa is emphasized in the fifth chapter to the extent of considering NM as the functional source of customs of the region. The sixth chapter is centred on the philosophical basis of rituals and festivals of the Jagannātha cult. In the final chapter, the author concludes that the Jagannātha cult has been the greatest source of inspiration behind the cultural efflorescence of Orissa and has left its indelible imprint on all types of cultural activities. The author finds the cult of Jagannātha that transcends all the bounds of caste and creed as a true reflection of Indian society – social order, ethical character, and general consciousness of the people.

This research, attempting to codify, interpret, and clarify the significant rituals performed as part of the Jagannātha worship, as enshrined in the *Nīlādrimahōdaya*, is a pioneering one. I appreciate the serious attempts made by the author in this regard.

Sebastian Alackapally

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Reg. No. R.N. 27399/75 ISSN: 0253-7222

JOURNAL OF DHARMA

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Website: www.journalofdharma.com

Published by
Dharma Research Association
Centre for the Study of World Religions
Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, 560 029 Bangalore, India

Printed at
National Printers
560 029 Bangalore, India